

Detective Keene's Neck-and-Neck Rival!

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BY WILLIAM G. PATTEN.

OLD NIGHT-HAWK, THE CROOK-SHADOWER;

Or, THE TANGLED-UP TYPE-WRITER.



"BACK—BACK, YOU HOUNDS OF THE LAW! I'LL BRAIN THE MAN WHO TRIES TO TOUCH ME!"

Old Night-Hawk,

THE CROOK-SHADOWER;

OR,
The Tangled-up Type-Writer.

A WALL STREET SENSATION.

BY WILLIAM G. PATTEN,

AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BOB, THE ROUND-ER," "OLD BURKE," "THE PRINCE OF NEW YORK CROOKS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A DOWN-TOWN TRAGEDY.

No one, glancing casually at him as he sauntered slowly down lower Broadway, would have suspected he was a detective, and much less that he was one of the most successful of New York's independent officers.

Such, however, was the case, and the name of Hawkins McKnight was a terror to evil-doers in the great Metropolis, his fame being extended to Chicago, Denver and San Francisco. He was commonly known as "Hawk," by some called "The Hawk," and the members of the dreaded East Side gangs, on whose dens and lairs he had led the raiding blue-coats between the hours of midnight and morning, spoke of him as "Old Night Hawk."

For all of this latter title, he was not an old man, or even one who had reached middle age, but he had a way of keeping the truth concerning his appearance a secret from the crooks, as he always dealt with them in disguise, and there were not three rascals in the country who could describe his looks.

He was of medium height, apparently rather slight of build, graceful in all his movements, seeming something of a dandy, for his clothes were of the very best material and the most fashionable cut, and he wore a polished silk hat upon his head. He also carried a cane that was much heavier and stouter than it looked.

He had a handsome face from the fact that it was bold and fearless, yet regular and grave with a wisdom that kept him from foolhardiness. A heavy dark-brown mustache shaded his mouth, partly hiding the firmly-closed lips. A pair of quick, keen eyes seemed to take in the face of every man in the throng that passed him.

Hawkins McKnight was tired of running down thugs and crooks such as band together for petty plunder and robbery with the occasional sandbagging and knifing of a victim. He had once offered to clean out all the organized gangs in New York City if Superintendent Byrnes would give him authority and render assistance promptly in every case when called upon; but the wary superintendent had told him to come on the force and they would give him all he wanted to do. This offer Hawk promptly declined with thanks, as he was a man who could not bear to have a boss over him. He had resigned four years before from New England Detective Force in order to have freedom to do exactly what he pleased and work on such cases as struck his fancy.

Now that he had made a reputation, Hawk was eager to show the police of Gotham that he could handle something besides ruffians, and he knew his position in the Metropolis would be assured if he could succeed in outwitting the regular officers on some case that was so prominent as to attract the universal attention of the public.

He was not far from the vicinity of Wall street when a young woman came rushing out upon the sidewalk and wildly grasped the arms of two policeman who had happened to meet at the ends of their beats just there.

"Quick!" she panted, terror expressed in her eyes and on her pretty face. "Come in and part them! It is terrible! They will kill each other!"

"What's that, miss?" sharply questioned one of the officers. "Fighting? Where?"

"In there—in Mr. Gregory's office! Quick! Mr. Gregory had a revolver! He swears he will shoot Judah Ryswick!"

A somewhat corpulent, smooth-faced man who had happened along in time to hear everything, now exclaimed:

"Follow me, officer! This way to Gregory's office!"

He led the way with the policemen close at his heels. The girl stood wringing her hands and looking about, and, after one glance that impressed her features on his mind forever, Hawk walked briskly in after the three officers, for he had recognized the corpulent man as Abel Keene, of the regular force, a man of ability for his work, notwithstanding his corpulence and his braggadocio.

As the four men hurried down the passage to the flight of stairs near the elevator, the sound of a shot came distinctly to their ears.

Keene bounded lightly up the stairs, despite his weight, and the two policemen were at his heels, with Hawkins McKnight just behind them.

They suddenly came to a door that bore this lettering on the ground glass of the upper half:

"ENOS GREGORY, BROKER."

One of the policemen had now taken the lead, and his hand was on the knob of the door when they all distinctly heard a crash of breaking glass, the sound seeming to come from within the office room.

The door yielded readily, and the four men entered the room, Hawk having presence of mind enough to shoot the spring lock and thus prevent the people who were hurrying to the spot from intruding.

There was but one room of Enos Gregory's office, but that was quite large. It was not well lighted, however, for this was but one flight up, and the brick wall of the building in the rear crowded close to the two windows of the room. This made it necessary for the broker to burn gas throughout the day.

As Hawk turned from the door, his keen eyes ran swiftly around the place, taking in everything. At one side was a desk with a chair before it, and near the desk stood a safe the doors of which were slightly opened.

Between the desk and the safe a man lay stretched on his left side, his head and shoulders being beyond the range of Hawk's vision.

A large man, past middle age, with white hair and iron-gray beard, leaned limply against one corner of the safe, fingering his throat with his left hand—a dazed look in the eyes as he turned on the men who had so suddenly invaded his office.

The four men halted and looked around, one of the policemen in advance.

For a few seconds, the silence in that room was absolute. The sound of hurrying feet and excited voices could be heard outside the door, but no one spoke or moved within.

Abel Keene made a motion to speak, and then one of the policemen advanced a foot.

All at once, like a flash, the broker caught up a chair and swung it above his head, the dazed light in his eyes giving place to one of fury and defiance, as he hoarsely cried:

"Back—back, you hounds of the law! I'll brain the man who tries to touch me!"

"Steady, Mr. Gregory," advised Keene, taking care to still remain behind one of the uniformed policemen. "You are not a man who should be afraid of us."

"Afraid!" came scornfully from the old broker's lips. "I'm not afraid of any four men in the world! I won't be arrested, like a common criminal! Stand back!"

Hawk, the Dapper Detective, was making no move, but not a word or a gesture escaped him, for he realized he was face to face with a "case" of more or less importance. He had obtained entrance unchallenged, and was there to pick up anything he might regard as important.

"There is no reason why you should be arrested if you have done nothing wrong," purred Keene, from his place of safety. "We heard there was trouble here, and so—"

"You intruded where you are not wanted. There's the door! Go!"

It is scarcely possible the man could have thought this "bluff" would be effective. The policeman advanced still another step, his eyes fastened on the broker.

"Put down the chair!" he commanded. "You're tryin' a fool trick, and a man like you ought to know it. We do not want a struggle with a respectable citizen. We're not here to arrest you unless you have done something to deserve arrest, and then it will

be much better to submit gracefully and peacefully."

"Just tell us what has happened, Mr. Gregory," smoothly invited Abel Keene. "We depend upon you to give us the particulars."

As if he suddenly understood the folly of his course, Enos Gregory lowered the chair, but he rested his hands upon it and stared defiantly at the officers, seeming ready to swing it again.

"What brought you here?" he demanded.

"A young lady came rushing out. She said there was trouble, and—"

"Where is she? Where has she gone?" eagerly demanded the broker.

"She must be outside. We heard the shot—"

"What shot?"

Again the dazed light entered his eyes, and again he lifted a hand to caress his throat, which was now bleeding a bit, as if from slight abrasures of the skin. His collar was awry and his necktie dangling, half torn away.

"Wasn't there a shot fired in this room?"

"I—I don't know."

With those words, his strength seemed to desert him, and he sunk upon a chair, covering his face with his hands.

The Dapper Detective sniffed the air. The smell of burned powder was in it.

One of the policemen stepped past Enos Gregory and looked down at the face of the young man stretched on the floor before the safe with a pool of blood forming about his head. Dropping on one knee, the officer made a hurried inspection.

"Bad business!" he muttered.

"What is it?" sharply demanded Abel Keene. "Is he badly injured?"

"Dead as Adam!" was the reply. "Shot square through the head! Looks like murder!"

CHAPTER II.

HAWK LOOKS AROUND.

AT sound of that ominous word, the old broker started up, trembling.

"No, no—not murder!" he cried. "I did it in self-defense!"

Abel Keene thought he saw his opportunity, and made haste to improve it:

"Tell us just how it happened, Mr. Gregory," he urged. "Make a clean breast."

Up to this point, Hawkins McKnight had kept in the background; now he stepped forward.

"Give the gentleman time to collect himself," came coolly from the Dapper Detective. "If he spoke hastily, he might regret it afterward."

The regular wheeled with a snarl that contrasted strangely with his purring manner of a few seconds before.

"Who are you?" he demanded, his voice harsh and rasping. "How do you come here? and what right have you to interfere?"

Had the questions been asked in other than an insulting manner, Hawk would have answered them readily enough; but he now met them with other questions:

"Who are you? and what right have you here? You have not been instructed to work up this case, Mr. Keene."

"So you know me! Well, I don't know you. Here, officers, put this fellow out."

One of the police stepped forward and placed a heavy hand on the Hawk's shoulder. The independent detective allowed himself to be escorted quite to the door, then he turned back his coat and showed the police a silver shield, at the same time uttering a few words in a low tone.

Immediately, the officer began to apologize, asking:

"Why didn't you say so before? Of course you can remain. We have instructions from Headquarters not to interfere with you in anything and to render assistance when called upon."

Abel Keene looked on in astonishment.

"What's this?" he cried. "Who is this—man?"

"This is Hawkins McKnight, Mr. Keene."

A look of repugnance flashed across Keene's fat face, but he immediately masked his emotions, holding out a pudgy hand, as he blandly said:

"Happy to meet you, Mr. McKnight. I

have heard of you often. But it seems to me this job is scarcely in your line. I understand you make a specialty of tough cases and running down petty crooks."

There was a hidden sneer in the final words, which Hawk did not fail to detect, but he calmly retorted:

"I make a specialty of any case I take hold of, Mr. Keene. But, aren't we wasting time in false moves and bandying words? Time is valuable occasionally."

"Just so," bowed Keene, pouting his thick underlip and scowling a bit. "I trust you will allow me to take the lead in this affair, as I have a great deal more experience in such matters. I am an older man than you, McKnight."

As if that settled it, he turned to Enos Gregory once more. The broker was sitting quietly on the chair, staring hard at the prostrate figure before the safe, as if he could not yet understand just what had happened.

Leaving Keene to pursue whatever course he chose, Hawk dropped on his knees beside the supposed dead man, ripping open the man's coat and vest and feeling for his heart. He could detect no flutter there, but a small mirror he held close to the man's lips soon bore a trace of moisture. Unhesitatingly the detective fingered the wound on the man's head, and then he turned to one of the policemen, saying simply:

"Summon an ambulance without delay. This man is not dead. He may be dying, but, if possible, we want to hear him speak before he gives up the ghost."

"Speak! Why, he is shot through the head!" exclaimed the officer who had made the first examination.

"You are mistaken, sir. The bullet has followed his skull around and come out behind. Call an ambulance, I say!"

It was a command, and there was no further delay. The policeman hastily left the office, his brother officer closing the door in the face of the wondering and staring knot of men gathered outside.

Abel Keene now questioned the broker once more.

"Did you shoot this man, Mr. Gregory?"

"I—I don't know," was the hesitating reply. "I can't say."

"You may as well tell us the whole unvarnished truth. He is not dead. We shall hear the story from his lips if he can be restored to consciousness. Did you shoot him?"

"I tell you I don't know—I can't say."

"Where is your revolver?"

"My revolver? I never carry one."

"Where is the revolver with which this man was shot?"

"I—I don't know."

At that instant Hawk was watching the broker, and he saw his eyes flash for one fleeting second toward one of the windows, an upper pane of which was broken. The Dapper Detective remembered the crash of breaking glass heard just before the door of the office was opened, and he fancied he knew where to find the revolver.

"You have confessed you did the deed in self defense. Why not tell just how it came about?" continued the regular.

All at once, Gregory rose swiftly to his feet, lifting his shaking hands above his head.

"I did not shoot him!" he cried. "I did not do it! But, God would have justified the act if I had!"

"If you did not shoot him, who did the deed, then?" came sharply from Keene's lips. "You are the only person we found in this room besides the man on the floor. Did he shoot himself?"

A strange look flashed over the broker's face—a look of relief and of cunning.

"Yes, yes!" he exclaimed. "That is it! He shot himself!"

"An extraordinary statement, sir!" burst from Keene's lips. "You are contradicting yourself. Be careful, be careful!"

"I'll swear to it!"

"But the young lady declared you had a revolver and was swearing you would shoot some one."

"She lied!" cried Enos Gregory, harshly, his face wearing an unpleasant look for the moment. "Ryswick had the revolver. He threatened my life!"

"Ryswick? That is this man's name?"

What is his business? Is he connected with you in any way?"

"No, no, no! I deny it!"—as if he had been accused of something.

"How did he happen in your office at this hour of the morning?"

"I found him here when I came in."

"Ah! Then he had broken into your office?"

"No."

"How did he get here?"

"He was admitted by my type-writer."

"Where is she now?"

"I don't know. She ran out."

"She was the young lady who told us there was trouble here?"

"I presume so."

"Who opens your office mornings?"

"The office boy, usually."

"Did he do so this morning?"

"I suppose so."

"Where is he now?"

"I have not seen him since I came in."

Enos Gregory was rapidly growing calmer, but he kept his eyes from the motionless body on the floor, over which the remaining policeman was now bending.

Hawk was moving about the room, looking here, there and everywhere, apparently searching for something. Abel Keene fancied the independent detective was looking for the weapon with which the shot had been fired. He was not always correct in his suppositions.

At length, the Dapper Detective discovered just what he was looking for. It was a bullet buried in the woodwork near the office door.

Hawk slowly took out his knife, all the while examining the bullet and the mark it had made, his object being to tell exactly from which direction it came. Having satisfied himself, he proceeded to dig it out with his knife. When it was freed, he looked it over an instant, and then dropped it into his pocket, after which, he walked about the room whistling softly. When he reached the window with the broken square in the upper portion, he unfastened the lock and softly pushed up the lower sash, so he could look out.

A knock sounded on the door, and the policeman hastened to admit the returned brother officer, behind whom came two young hospital surgeons.

The surgeons lost no time in examining the wounded man.

"Will he die?" eagerly asked Enos Gregory, his voice sunk to a harsh whisper, both eagerness and fear expressed on his face.

"He may," was the reply. "Still, there is a ghost of a chance for him."

The broker fell back with a smothered groan that plainly expressed regret. It seemed that he was anxious for Ryswick to die.

Abel Keene was watching Gregory's face and noting every change of expression, and a hard look came over his face as he observed the broker's eagerness to know if the wounded man would die.

Suddenly the regular detective thought of Hawkins McKnight. What was Hawk doing? He turned to look for the independent officer, and an exclamation of astonishment broke from his pudgy lips.

"Where is he?"

Although the office door had not been opened since the surgeons came in, Hawk had vanished silently from the room!

CHAPTER III.

FOUND BENEATH A WINDOW.

WHAT had become of Hawk?

The question was quickly answered.

Not only was the broken window open now, but the other window had been flung up and was standing wide open also.

Keene hurried to this window and looked out. He saw The Hawk on the ground beneath the window, closely examining a revolver he had just picked up.

"So you have found the weapon?" cried the man in the window.

"It looks like it," calmly acknowledged the man on the ground, without glancing up.

"He threw it out of the window?"

"He threw it *through* the window."

"Certainly. That explains the crash of breaking glass we heard. How many chambers of the revolver are empty?"

"One."

"Ha! That's right—that's as it should be! Bring it up, Mr. McKnight, and permit me to examine it. This case is a very simple little affair—very simple."

Hawk had descended by the fire-escape and ladder that leaned against the building close to the escape. He came up the ladder and was soon at the open window.

"Was that ladder there when you went down?" asked Keene.

"Yes, sir."

"That's odd."

Hawk had thought it odd, but he kept his counsel. He was not given to unnecessary talking.

Keene examined the revolver eagerly.

"Why, what's this?" he exclaimed, with a heavy frown. "Have you removed the cartridge shell from this weapon and cleaned it, McKnight?"

"By no means, sir."

"But the shell is gone, and the weapon has been cleaned since it was fired."

"So I observed."

The two men looked into each other's eyes, Keene with a puzzled look on his face, Hawk with features utterly inexpressive.

"There was no time for cleaning this weapon and removing the empty shell after we heard the shot fired."

"Hardly."

"Yet the shell is gone, and the revolver has been cleaned. What do you make of it?"

"It strikes me as a trifle odd."

"I should say so!"

Keene walked over to where Enos Gregory was sitting on the chair.

"Is this your revolver?" he asked.

The old broker drew back from the weapon, as if afraid of it, thrusting out one hand and answering sharply:

"I tell you I never carry a revolver!"

"Still, you may keep one in the office. Is this your weapon?"

"It is not."

"Be careful, Mr. Gregory! Every word you say now will be weighed."

The old gentleman slowly arose to his feet, drawing his heavy figure up to its full height, his eyes showing how deeply he was angered.

"Sir," he said, coldly, "on 'change my word is good as my draft. I am known everywhere, and no gentleman questions my veracity. You are insolent!"

In a moment, all Abel Keene's suavity had vanished, and his face took on a bull-dog expression.

"I beg you will not be hasty," came sternly from his lips. "If you will but consider the matter a moment, you will see I warned you for your own good. We are trying to get at the facts of this matter as swiftly as possible, and it is your place to render all the aid you can. In the first place, you declared you killed this man in self-defense; now you have changed your tone and swear he shot himself. Where is the weapon with which he shot himself?"

"I presume that is it you have in your hand."

"Do you know where it was found? Well, sir, it was found beneath this back window on the ground. How came it there?"

"How should I know?"

"You *do* know! See that broken pane of glass. Well, somebody flung this weapon through that. It could not have been Ryswick after he shot himself, so it must have been you. Was it?"

"You say it *must* have been."

"But what do *you* say?"

Enos Gregory hesitated a moment, and then he slowly replied, as if he had considered the matter:

"Yes, I threw the revolver out of the window."

"But you say Ryswick shot himself."

"I do." The broker was becoming defiant, and the Dapper Detective, who was now sitting on one edge of the desk, lightly drumming with his fingers, while he stared up at the ceiling, allowed a smile to flit across his face. Even that, however, did not betray his thoughts.

Hawk knew Keene had taken a bad course with the broker, but it was not his place to interfere. However, his ears and eyes were still wide open.

The portly detective looked sternly at Gregory, who now closed his lips and returned the stare, seeming to gather himself, as if for assault.

"If Ryswick shot himself with this revolver, how came it in your possession after the act, and why should you fling it from the window?"

"He was trying to shoot again. I wrenched the weapon from his grasp."

Both the detectives now felt sure that the broker had told a deliberate falsehood, for the wound in the injured man's head was of a nature to render him unconscious immediately on receiving it.

Plain enough, Enos Gregory, whatever his reputation for veracity might be, had reasons to prevaricate in this matter, and he was doing so deliberately.

After a brief silence, Abel Keene lifted the revolver, asking:

"Is this the weapon you wrested from him?"

"You say it was found beneath the window, so it must be the one."

"Did you extract the empty shell and clean the revolver before casting it out of the window?"

"Most certainly not, sir!"

"The shell has been removed from this weapon and it has been cleaned since it was fired."

"I know nothing about that."

Like a flash, Keene wheeled upon another tack.

"What made Mr. Ryswick shoot himself?"

"How should I know that? Business troubles, I presume."

"Have you a reason for thinking so?"

There was another brief hesitation; then the broker suddenly seemed to decide on his course, for he defiantly said:

"I shall answer just such questions as I choose. I am willing to answer this one. This man did not tell me why he meant to commit suicide. He simply thrust the weapon to his head and fired."

"What was he doing when you entered this office?"

"Talking to Miss Hasty."

"And she is—who?"

"My type-writer."

"Was he talking excitedly?"

"I should say so. He had the revolver in his hand."

"Was he threatening her?"

"I do not know."

"What did you do?"

"I interfered."

"You were previously acquainted with Ryswick?"

"Slightly."

"Did he attempt to shoot you?"

"No, no, no!"

"Then you were in no personal danger?"

"None at all."

"If that is true, why did you say when we first entered that you did it in self-defense?"

"I was confused—I knew not what I was saying. You are trying to trap me. I refuse to answer further questions!"

"If you are an innocent man, there is no reason in the world why you should fear to answer truthfully."

But Keene was not to worm anything more from the broker just then, although he vainly tried to do so; and, seeing this, the Hawk sauntered lightly back to the open window, swung out on the fire-escape and disappeared.

He had an idea there was something more to be found beneath the window.

And he found it—another revolver!

CHAPTER IV.

KEENE INVESTIGATES.

IN the mean time, a stretcher was brought up to the office and the wounded man placed upon it. He had not regained consciousness, for all of the efforts of the surgeons, and it seemed he was surely dying.

It was decided to take him to the hospital as soon as possible, for further treatment.

Abel Keene, shrewd officer though he was supposed to be, was somewhat in doubt about the best course to pursue. Had the man been dead or had Enos Gregory been a

nobody, he would not have hesitated a moment. Now he felt that any harsh or decided move might balk his efforts to solve the mystery of the shooting before the general public became aware the shooting had occurred.

He knew the newspapers would make much of the affair, not only because of the singular circumstances under which it took place, but for reason that Enos Gregory was supposed to be a very wealthy man and his wife and daughter moved in fashionable society. If he worked it swiftly to a solution, it would be an advertisement for "shrewd Detective Keene."

He held a hurried consultation with one of the policemen, who nodded assent, and, as Judah Ryswick was being carried out on the stretcher, the Police Department ferret came and placed a hand on Gregory's arm, saying:

"You had better go home, sir, and get the tangle in your head straightened out. You are all broken up now. I will probably call to see you later."

"But, aren't you going to arrest me?" exclaimed the broker, in surprise.

"For what?" sharply demanded the detective, his sharp little eyes on the other's face.

"For—for—" He was confused, and he hesitated. With a grim smile, Keene cut in:

"I told you that you were all broken up. My dear sir, take my advice and go home, where you can be quiet. If you don't, you'll surely say something more that you'll regret."

"Something more?"

"You have already got your statements slightly twisted. Purely the result of your confusion, of course. Still, it is probable the man actually did shoot himself. You have the benefit of the doubt at present. If given permission by the chief, I shall sift this matter to the bottom."

Enos Gregory closed his safe, first taking from it some papers and putting them in the breast pocket of his coat. The windows of the office were also closed and fastened, the gas turned out, and then he was ready to leave.

Keene had been lingering, and he walked out with the broker. They descended the stairs, the detective talking all the time about some matter in no way connected with the affair, but, just as they were at the foot, he suddenly said:

"Ah! by the way, your type-writer—what did you say her name is?"

"Miss Mabel Hasty."

"Where does she live?"

"I do not know."

"What?"

"It is true."

"How long has she been with you?"

"One week."

"Who recommended her?"

"Judah Ryswick."

"So! And you took her on his recommendation?"

"After giving her trial—yes."

"Is it possible you did not learn where she lives or boards? Such a thing is very strange."

The broker drew himself up stiffly.

"Do you doubt me, sir?"

"Not at all! not at all! Did the young lady prove satisfactory?"

"Well—yes."

"You hesitate. Why?"

"Am I on trial? Why do you ask all these foolish questions? I refuse to answer any more of them."

Then he strode stiffly along the corridor and out of the front door, seeming utterly regardless of the many curious eyes turned upon him. He did not even hear the whispered words of one newsboy to another:

"Dat's him—dat's de mug w'ot shot de feller! Hi! but ain't he some guns!"

Detective Keene smiled knowingly, as he hastily jotted down some notes in a little book, muttering:

"So he doesn't know where to find Miss Hasty! Well, well, well! And Judah Ryswick recommended the young lady! This is interesting! And he found Miss Hasty and Judah Ryswick together in his office when he entered! Now, I wonder if that is true? It seems to me that Ryswick and the type-writer girl had a pinch on the old man. It

looks as if an attempt at blackmail were behind the affair."

Enos Gregory was shadowed when he rode up-town, although he did not know it. Abel Keene had taken care that all the broker's actions should be observed. It was no trick at all to see that one of the policemen had the suspected man placed under surveillance.

He had not forgotten Hawkins McKnight, but he fancied the independent detective had slipped out of the room by the door. He wondered if Hawk would spend any time on the case, and smiled to himself to think what a small show of doing anything the Dapper Detective would have in competition with himself.

To Police Headquarters he went, and he had soon received instructions to thoroughly investigate the shooting. He promptly set to work to find out about Judah Ryswick.

Ryswick seemed to be a man without friends, and the task was much larger than Keene had anticipated it would be. In fact, the further he pushed his investigations the greater became his mystification.

Ryswick was a sort of man-about-town, and his true means of support were not visible to the naked eye. It was said he played the races occasionally, and he had been known to take a flyer in Wall street. He always seemed to have plenty of cold cash in his purse, or else was right handy at drawing checks which were promptly and unhesitatingly honored.

But where he lived was the greatest mystery. Sometimes he would stop a few days at some first-class hotel, but mostly he stopped—where? He was a veritable night-bird, and he never appeared on Broadway before three o'clock in the afternoon. It was astonishing that he should be in Enos Gregory's office at such a remarkably early hour.

The man had even tried to work his way into good society, but had failed in this and been blackballed at several high class clubs. He had no antecedents—his entire past was shrouded in mystery, and he did not seem inclined to lift the shroud.

For all of this mystery, and for all of the fact that he was given to risking money on chances, he was said to be a man whose word could be relied on. He was young—not more than twenty-seven—and ambitious. Not a few were inclined to think society and the fashionable clubs had treated him very shabbily.

Ryswick was handsome and magnetic. If not popular with his own sex, he certainly was with the opposite.

But all this did not seem to assist Abel Keene materially in solving the mystery of the shooting. He decided his hope lay in Mabel Hasty, the type-writer. If he could find her, he believed he could learn the truth.

Then he turned to Ryswick, hoping the man would have his senses enough to tell where Miss Hasty could be found. He lost no time in getting to the hospital.

There he was disappointed, for he was informed Ryswick had not recovered enough to be questioned and there was danger he would die if excited.

Keene thought the luck infernal, and plainly expressed his opinion of the hospital and the surgeons.

"There are some things I must know!" he cried. "If this man dies without speaking, who can tell whether he suicided or not?"

"Suicide!" exclaimed the surgeon. "That is in no way probable."

"But Enos Gregory, the broker, swears he saw the man use a revolver on himself."

"Then Enos Gregory, the broker—lies! The bullet struck the man's skull from behind! Do you imagine for a moment any man is going to hold the muzzle of a revolver against the back of his head when he tried to blow his brains out! More than that, the muzzle of the weapon was not within a foot of the man's head when the shot was fired!"

Abel Keene pursed up his pudgy lips and whistled softly, closing his left eye.

"By Jove!" he thought; but the only expression of surprise that reached the surgeon was the look on the detective's face. "This settles it! The man could not have shot himself! But I never dreamed he did. Still, there is no doubt but that he was shot in the back of the head! That looks bad for the plea of self-defense. And that the muzzle of the weapon was more than one foot

away—perhaps three, four or five feet—oh, oh! *That was murder!*"

And, what he had thus been told, Hawkins McKnight had known as soon as he examined the wound of the unconscious man found before the open safe.

CHAPTER V. THE THIEF.

THE HAWK had not thought it necessary to tell Abel Keene all he had discovered. With ready fingers, he had examined the wound on Judah Ryswick's head before the surgeons appeared, and that examination had told him the man was shot from behind. The bullet, battered and flattened, was in his possession.

It was not necessary for him to learn that the empty shell was gone from the revolver he found, and that the weapon had been cleaned. He knew at a glance that that revolver had not fired the bullet which struck Judah Ryswick down!

The bullet came from a weapon of *smaller* caliber!

But, how came that revolver beneath the broken window?

Where was the revolver with which the shot had been fired?

He would have continued his search had not Abel Keene called him up. However, he was soon back beneath the window, his eyes gleaming and his lips firm set, while his nostrils expanded like those of a hound that scents game.

There were the outlines of two small feet down there, and he measured them carefully. Then he looked around and found the second revolver behind a bit of rubbish.

It was a weapon carrying 22-caliber cartridges. The first revolver found had been a 32-caliber weapon.

As he turned it over in his hand, the fancy came to him that it was just the kind of a pistol a woman would carry.

And those tracks—a little coarse, as if poor shoes were worn—might be the tracks of a woman.

One chamber of the little weapon was empty, and it had not been cleaned since the cartridge was fired.

"Here is the pistol that did the shooting!" decided Hawk; but he did not express himself aloud.

He spent more than thirty minutes in the narrow alley, and by that time the office above was deserted.

But he had wasted no time, and when he left that spot he had already formed a theory of the affair that gave him something to work on.

He took an up-town Elevated train at Rector street, getting off at Twenty-third street.

He had reached Fifth avenue when a closed carriage with two spirited horses attached came tearing along, the driver having quite lost control of his animals.

A Broadway upward bound surface car had halted at the north side of Twenty-third street to allow two or three passengers to leave it. One of these, a tall gentleman with an iron-gray beard, started toward Madison Square, and, not hearing or heeding the shouted warnings, was struck and bowled over by the runaway animals.

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed Hawk, who had seen everything and obtained a fair look at the pedestrian's face just as he went down. "That was Enos Gregory!"

On ran the horses, but the broker lay still on the hard stones, evidently badly injured. A crowd rushed forward with a swoop and gathered about him in a moment.

Hawk reached the broker's side just in time to observe a queer thing.

The man who had first lifted Enos Gregory's head, swiftly and slyly slipped a hand into the breast pocket of the unconscious man's coat and abstracted some papers therefrom. The papers disappeared like magic.

The Dapper Detective's first thought was to grasp the man and expose him, but, following right on the heels of that, was a wiser idea.

Policemen forced their way forward, driving the crowd back, and it was but a few seconds before the man who had secured the papers retreated to the outskirts of the gathering and then walked slowly away.

Although Hawk would have given a great

deal to know how badly Mr. Gregory was injured, he followed the thief.

The man who had taken the papers was fairly well-dressed and respectable in appearance, wearing a crease in his pants and a dented Alpine hat that was canted a trifle rakishly over his left ear. He stepped with a jaunty air, which plainly indicated the triumph he felt.

And Hawk believed that chance had led him upon a new scent. Something told the independent detective there was much more in the whole affair than appeared on the surface.

The fellow had not offered to get away with the broker's watch and chain, which were the handiest things to secure, nor had he seemed to covet the man's purse or pocketbook. Thus it became plain it was the papers and the papers alone he desired.

The thief walked rapidly along Twenty-third street to Third avenue, down which he turned.

Hawk always took the opposite side of the street, not a move of the man he was shadowing missing his keen eyes, although his eyes seemed constantly turned upon the sidewalk at his feet.

The thief was about to enter a cheap hotel when a female figure suddenly darted out of a doorway and a gloved hand clutched his arm.

Hawk gave a start.

"By Jove! *The type-writer!*"

And so it was—the very girl who had rushed from Enos Gregory's office to call on the two policemen to enter and part the combatants!

Quickly the Dapper Detective crossed the street, quite altering the natural expression of his face as he hurried over, so, by the time he reached the opposite sidewalk he did not look in the least like the calm-faced, handsome young man who had been sauntering so leisurely along a few moments before.

It was one of the independent detective's handiest and most valuable accomplishments, as it often served him in the place of other disguise. He had a natural gift for the trick, and, with the attention and practice he had put upon it, he could assume a hundred different faces without the aid of make-ups, so well in control were the muscles of his countenance.

Now, with his silk hat tipped to one side, his stick held midway, his elbows pointing outward and the black cigar in his mouth angling upward, he sauntered down Third avenue with the thoroughly tough air of a Bowery sport who was "dead in it." The change in the man's appearance was simply wonderful, for even his clothes which had been so graceful and appropriate on the Dapper Detective now became appropriate for the assumed character. They seemed to fit him after the style of a cheap hand-me-down suit, and the crease in his pants appeared to add to the effort at imitating the swells of Fifth avenue.

Any one would have sworn after a look at his face that his parents were direct from Ireland, for Irish appeared to stick out all over his mug.

If the type-writer girl had noticed his appearance when she rushed from Enos Gregory's office, she would not have recognized him as he came swaggering down Third avenue.

Hawk passed as close to the girl and the man he had shadowed as he could, his ears wide open. He heard the man asking:

"Why are you here? Why didn't you go home?"

"They said he had shot Ryswick. I thought he would put a spotter after me. I didn't dare go back there."

"You fool!" came coarsely from the young fellow's lips. "You ought to stay and bluff it out."

"And get pinched! Excuse me!"

"Bah! No danger of that!"

"All the same, there *is*! The man has a wife and a daughter, I know, but—"

"That's the point; he wouldn't dare say a word. And if he dared, it is possible he will not be able to do so."

Hawk had paused to stare into a window, and apparently was too far away to hear what passed between them, but he had wonderfully acute hearing, and so scarcely lost a word.

"Not able? What do you mean?"

"He was run down by runaway horses at Fifth avenue and Twenty-third street half an hour ago."

The girl uttered a cry of dismay.

"Enos Gregory?"

"Sure, sis."

"Badly injured?"

"Dead, maybe."

"You didn't find out?"

"No; I couldn't spare the time."

"You're the fool! Why, everything depends on him! If he has been seriously injured—"

"What?"

"The jig's up. We didn't get hold of the papers after all, and—"

"I know *you* failed to get the papers," came triumphantly from the lips of the thief; "but I have them safe in me pocket!"

CHAPTER VI.

MUTTERINGS.

THE girl gave a cry of surprise and incredulity.

"You're kidding!" she exclaimed.

"Not on your life, sis!"

"How'd you do it?"

"Didn't I say I saw the old sport bowled over? Well, I was the first one to reach him. See?"

"You swiped the papers?"

"Bet your wealth!"

The girl showed symptoms of a strong desire to fling her arms about his neck, but he warned her to keep off.

"I've got 'em here in my pocket," he said.

"Ryswick's little game goes, even if Ryswick is not in it."

"But I shall not dare go back to the old place. I must keep out of sight. You must stow me away somewhere, Bob."

In vain he tried to persuade her to go back and make a bluff; she absolutely refused.

"All right," he growled, rather sulkily.

"Come in here." Then he took her into the hotel by the ladies' entrance.

Hawk was satisfied he had scented a daring conspiracy, but he could not yet understand just what the game could possibly be. He made sure that the young thief he had shadowed secured a room at the hotel for the girl, and then watched and waited for him to appear. He knew the room to which they had taken their way, and, as he walked cat-like down the corridor and past the door, he heard the man's voice through the open fanlight, saying:

"Well, if you're goin' to lay dark, see that you do so. Keep out of sight till I find out how much dust is kicked up."

To this the girl agreed, and Hawk had paused at a door far down the corridor and was examining a bunch of keys, as if about to insert one in the lock, when the thief came out.

In front of the hotel, the men who had secured the papers hailed and boarded a downtown surface car. He did not notice another man who got upon the forward platform of the car as he stepped upon the back.

It was no difficult trick for Hawk to follow the young fellow to a Bowery saloon and overhear some of his conversation with a friend; but the detective was a trifle disappointed that no mention was made of the Gregory affair.

He shadowed the thief for two hours, but it was time wasted after the Third avenue hotel was left.

Finally, he decided the papers had probably been left in the girl's care. He was strongly tempted to return to the hotel and recover them by strategy or force, but feared that would ruin his chance of discovering just the kind of a game was being played against the unfortunate broker. He preferred to take more desperate chances and make a more brilliant success if he succeeded in sifting the matter. He knew in whose possession the papers were, and that satisfied him for the present.

His next thought was to discover exactly how bad Enos Gregory had been injured, and he therefore lost little time in getting to the broker's residence on Madison avenue.

There he represented himself as a newspaper reporter, and succeeded in getting into the residence.

He first set upon the butler, who assured him Mr. Gregory had been severely injured,

the blow on his head having made him delirious.

"The physicians are up there with him now," said the butler, motioning toward the broad carpeted stairs. "Miss Gregory is nearly dead with grief."

"And Mrs. Gregory?"

"Well, sir, she feels bad, of course, but not near as bad as Miss Meda."

"Miss Gregory is his only child?"

"Yes, sir."

"How old is she?"

"Eighteen, sir."

"And handsome?"

"Judge for yourself; she is coming."

A young girl came slowly down the stairs, and, despite the signs of grief on her face, she was really a charming creature. Her hair was that rare natural golden color that no bleach can produce, and her eyes were dark brown and limpid as a brook. Her figure was one for an artist's brush, while every move seemed the essence of poetic grace.

Never had Hawkins McKnight beheld a more bewilderingly "stunning" girl, but he was cool enough not to forget what had brought him there in the broker's home.

He stepped forward, bowing low.

"I trust you will pardon me," he quickly spoke. "I must have a few words with you, Miss Gregory—about your father. Please do not refuse. I know something about this affair, as I happened to witness everything."

"You saw my father when he was run down?"

"I did, Miss Gregory."

"Then you must come into the reception-room and tell me just how it happened. Poor papa! It has nearly killed me."

They entered the room, and Hawk had soon captured the girl's interest and attention by his fascinating manners and his sympathetic conversation. He was a talented man, with the real polish of a gentleman when he saw fit to assume it, and knew exactly how to play on the girl's fancy so as to induce her to answer the many questions that came from his crafty tongue. And yet, all the while, it seemed to Meda that he was answering questions for her.

It was Hawk's aim to discover if the family knew of Enos Gregory having an enemy. It did not take him long to find out that Meda knew of none such, although she declared her father habitually told her all about himself and his affairs, making her the confidante his wife declined to become.

He also discovered that the girl had a lover, a young man by the name of Gerald Valdimier. The Valdimiers were one of the best families, and Gerald was considered a "great catch."

"Father has raved a great deal during the last hour," she said. "Even though I know of no dangerous enemy he has in all the wide world, he seemed to fancy now that he is beset by foes."

A sudden resolution entered the detective's head; he must listen to the words that fell from the injured broker's lips.

"Miss Gregory," he said, looking her square in the face, "I am a stranger to you, but I think you are something of a character reader. Tell me, do you think I am an honest man?"

She was startled.

"You look like one, sir."

"I told you I had something of importance to tell you, and I have. I am going to trust you, which is contrary to my custom, as I trust no one. I believe you are a girl to keep a secret, and you must keep this one from everybody—from Mr. Valdimier, from your mother even. Will you promise?"

She was frightened, and drew still further from him. He immediately assured her she had no cause for fear.

"Why should I give you such a promise?" she asked. "What is this horrible secret you would tell me?"

"It concerns your father—concerns his very life. Shall I tell you?"

"My father—he has done nothing—"

"No, no; do not misunderstand me. I have no imputations to make; but I wish to confide in you. Perhaps you can aid me."

"Well, I give you my promise."

"That is good. First, I am a detective."

"A detective?"

"Yes, Miss Gregory; not a newspaper reporter. That was simply an artifice to get

into the house, pardonable, I am sure. Second, I have discovered there is a conspiracy against your father."

She was pale and trembling now. He continued, firmly and yet gently:

"It is better you should know it from my lips than from a newspaper. A man was severely injured in your father's office to-day just before Mr. Gregory came up-town. That man was taken to Bellevue, and may die."

"But, how is my father concerned? How was the man injured?"

"There is a theory that he committed suicide."

Then Hawk went on to gradually unfold the whole affair to her. He impressed her with the belief that her father's life had been threatened. He even let her understand some of the papers might claim that Mr. Gregory shot Judah Ryswick. She was shaken by the recital, but when it was ended, she asked:

"What can I do?"

"I think you may be able to assist me in solving this mystery, if you will."

"How?"

"By taking me to the room where your father is, so I can hear his wandering words without being seen. He may let something drop that will give me a clue to the whole situation."

Ten minutes later, Hawk was behind some *portieres* in the room where the injured broker lay groaning on the great bed, attended by a nurse and two physicians. He did not have to wait long before Gregory started up, grinding his teeth and crying:

"There's the door! Go! Those papers—ah! safe—you would rob me! What—black-mail! It won't work! Poor old Missouri Pacific! What a hammering! I'm too old a man for such folly, young woman! Erie dropped two points. The tide must turn soon or I'm lost! She shall never know—never!"

Then he fell back gasping, to be lowered by the physicians.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERIOUS MRS. CLAXTON.

THOSE words told the listener nothing he had not already suspected, and he was somewhat disappointed.

"It will come by and by," he thought, as he settled himself comfortably to watch and listen.

Meda Gregory had left him alone behind the curtains, for he had succeeded in quite winning her confidence, his manner being most magnetic.

Perhaps thirty minutes passed before the injured broker spoke another word the detective could understand. The doctors consulted with their heads close together, and the nurse watched silently at the unfortunate man's bedside. Finally, Gregory began speaking calmly, as if talking to some imaginary person:

"I'm a humbug," he declared; "and I'm thought to be one of the frankest men in New York. I'm a liar and a scoundrel. Do you believe it? Wall street is full of liars and scoundrels. Didn't they maul Missouri Pacific? Down she went! And I dropped seventy-five thousand dollars!"

"Don't tell her, will you? Thank you, old boy. A drink? Well, just one to brace me. It's fearful on a man's nerves. Look how this life is putting the white into my hair. But, I can't drop out now. I might six months ago, but—well, you know. This is a strictly private matter. Don't mention it. Thank you."

Again he was silent, breathing regularly, as if asleep, his eyes closed.

Hawk waited impatiently.

At length, the broker began again:

"Yes, you are very quick to catch on, miss. I think you will suit me very well. Mr. Ryswick is welcome any time."

Hawk pricked up his ears, and the injured man went on:

"No. 36 West—th street, did you say? And you live there alone? Oh, your brother! Mean to remain single? That's what every pretty girl says. Come, come! this won't do! You say you want to invest fifty thousand dollars, Ryswick? In White Eagle Mining Stock. The young lady does very well—yes, I am satisfied. This is strictly a private matter, sir!"

"No. 36 West—th street," softly muttered the Dapper Detective, as he jotted the address down in his book.

"Just the address I was looking for," softly spoke a voice behind him.

He wheeled, to find himself face to face with Abel Keene, who was also making a memorandum in a note-book.

"You?" muttered The Hawk.

"Exactly!" grunted the other. "I always happen around at the proper time. I presume you will visit No. 26 immediately?"

"I may."

"I shall go there at once. If you care to waste your time on this case, come along with me. You may be able to learn something by observing my methods."

Keene was an insufferable egotist, but Hawk repressed a smile.

"Well," he calmly said, "I'll go along."

He did not like to leave that spot just then, for Enos Gregory might say something that would clear up the whole mystery; but Keene would benefit by it if they both remained.

A short time later, the rival detectives left the house together and walked over to Broadway, where they took a surface car for down-town.

Without loss of time, they proceeded to No. 36 West—th street, which they found to be a flat-house. An examination of the names at the door failed to reveal the one they were looking for.

"This is the place," said Keene. "She may have lived with some of these other people here. We'll ring the first bell and make inquiries."

From floor to floor they proceeded, inquiring for Miss Mabel Hasty, but no one seemed to know of a person by such a name. The top flat, which was let furnished, had been taken two weeks before by a Mrs. Claxton.

The Irish servant girl who came to the door informed them that Mrs. Claxton was out. She knew nothing of Mabel Hasty, and said there were but three people in the Claxton family—Mrs. Claxton, her brother Bob, and Mr. Claxton, who showed up at the flat occasionally.

Keene was disgusted.

"We have wasted time over the mutterings of a deranged man," he said. "The girl did not stop here. If she told him so, it was a bluff. Come on."

But, Hawk did not turn away so quickly. "Excuse me," he said, with the utmost politeness, addressing the red-cheeked Irish girl.

"It's excusable ye are," she promptly grinned.

"What did you say Mrs. Claxton's brother's name is?"

"She called him Bob."

"Was he at home a great deal?"

"Well, sur, off an' on."

"Will you describe him?"

The girl did so, and a look of satisfaction crossed the Dapper Detective's face.

"What are you driving at?" grunted Abel Keene, his little eyes glistening.

"We have found the right place," declared Hawk.

"The right place?"

"Yes; Mabel lives here."

"How do you know?"

"Never mind; I do know. Come in."

The girl would have closed the door in their faces, but they suddenly flashed their badges before her face, and she was frightened.

"Detectives ye are?" she cried. "An' hiv yez come to arrest me? It's niver a thing hiv Oi done!"

Hawk reassured her, and she led the way into the parlor. The girl had described the young fellow who robbed Enos Gregory of the papers, and the Dapper Detective remembered the missing girl had addressed that same fellow as Bob.

A little questioning revealed the fact that Mrs. Claxton was away from the flat every day from 9:30 in the morning until 3:30 in the afternoon.

The two detectives exchanged significant looks, and then Keene, fully getting the scent, took the whole matter out of Hawk's hands. He did all the questioning, while the independent detective sat quietly in a chair and listened. Keene flattered himself he was showing the private "a few points."

"Now, my girl," he said, fixing the Irish lass with his black eyes, "I want you to tell me the truth."

"An' is it loiares ye associate wid usually, sur?" asked the girl.

Keene frowned at this impudence, but went on:

"Did Mrs. Claxton ever receive other gentlemen here besides her husband and brother?"

"Seldom, sur."

"But she did occasionally?"

"Well, wance or twice."

"What kind of gentlemen—describe them?"

"There were but wan, av ye plaze."

"Only one? Well, describe him."

"Oi didn't see him very well, but Oi made out he were tall, sur, and gettin' away wid the years, for his beard was full of white and his hair fuller shtill."

Keene cast a look at Hawk that plainly said, "I knew it all the time;" but the Dapper Detective was lying back in the easy-chair, his eyes on the ceiling, whistling softly to himself. He scarcely seemed conscious of his surroundings, and surely no expression of his face gave an inkling of his thoughts.

Once more fixing the girl with his glance, the regular continued with his questions:

"How many times did this gentleman visit Mrs. Claxton?"

"Not more than twice, sur."

"At what time of day?"

"In the evening, sur."

"Were Mr. Claxton or Mrs. Claxton's brother at home either time?"

"No, sur."

Keene nodded his satisfaction, uttering a grunt that might have come from the throat of a hog; but Hawkins McKnight still stared at the ceiling and whistled gently.

"Did you hear Mrs. Claxton call the old gentleman by name?"

"She called him fayther, sur."

"Father?"

"Yis, sur."

Keene smiled, knowingly.

"He looked like a gentleman?"

"He did thot."

"Black clothes, silk hat?"

"Yis, sur."

"Has Mrs. Claxton returned since she left the house this morning?"

"No, sur."

"Have you a photograph of her that you can find?"

"There is wan in the album, sur. Here it is, sur."

The open album was placed in his hands, and before him he saw the face of a rather handsome and stylish young lady. Hawk made no offer to look at the photograph, and Keene spoke to him somewhat testily:

"Here, man! see if you recognize her."

The independent detective brought his eyes down from the ceiling and stopped whistling for awhile to glance at the picture. Then he calmly answered:

"I have seen her."

"It is Mabel Hasty, the type-writer?"

"Without a doubt."

"The game now seems pretty clear."

"Does it?"

Hawk seemed to ask the question innocently enough, but Keene glanced at him suspiciously.

"Of course it does!" he burst out. "I can see the whole business from start to finish."

"You are a very shrewd man, Mr. Keene."

"Is that intended for sarcasm, sir?"

"Oh, of course not!"

The independent detective slowly turned the leaves of the album until he came to the photograph of a rather handsome man. He was looking at the picture intently when the Irish girl observed:

"Thot is Misther Claxton himself, though Hiven knows why he do not be afther stayin' at home wid his woife."

The photograph was a first-class likeness of Judah Ryswick the man who had been shot in the office of Enos Gregory, the broker!

CHAPTER VIII.

KEENE EXPLAINS IT ALL.

"THAT settles it!" grunted Abel Keene, rubbing his hands together.

But Hawk said nothing.

"What hiv Mrs. Claxton been afther doin'?" cried the girl. "It's me wages she

owes for two wakes. Oi can't afford to lose thot!"

"I don't suppose a picture of Mrs. Claxton's father is to be found here?" said Keene, as he looked through the album. "The man had discretion enough not to let her get hold of that."

"But there is a picture of her brother," affirmed Hawk, as he pointed out the likeness of the young fellow he had seen steal the papers from Enos Gregory's pocket.

"Thot it is, sur," nodded the servant.

The portly detective looked sharply at Hawkins McKnight, gruffly asking:

"How did you know it was her brother?"

"Can you not discern a likeness?" returned Hawk, and, for an instant, a smile swept across his face.

"Well—yes—a faint one," confessed Keene; "but it is not so striking that I should have pronounced him her brother at a glance. Of course it was quite accidental on your part, McKnight. After all, you are a rather bright fellow."

This was in the most patronizing manner, but it did not arouse anything more than Hawk's merriment, and the independent detective laughed quietly to himself, as he sat down on the easy-chair once more.

There was no fear that the servant would run away, so Keene requested her to leave them but remain within call, as she might be required to answer other questions.

When the girl was gone, the portly detective turned to Hawk, observing:

"The whole affair is clear now. It is a simple little case, anyhow. You will waste your time to fool with it more, McKnight."

"Think so?" carelessly asked the Dapper Detective, glancing at his watch.

"I am certain of it."

"You make it—what?"

"Well, I don't know as I should tell you—and I don't know as it will do any harm. It may show you how I analyze a case like this, and you are a man above demanding hush-money, and what you have discovered must have given you an inkling of the truth."

"Thanks," said Hawk, behind one shapely hand, turning a smile into a cough. "You are flattering!"

"It is my way to always make a note of everything, mentally, if not otherwise, and I observed the girl who came running from Enos Gregory's office to the sidewalk to call on the police was pretty. Despite the fact, there was a certain shrewdness about her face that did not impress me favorably. Later, when I learned she was Gregory's type writer, I knew she had obtained a position in his office for a purpose."

"Very shrewd of you," commented Hawk.

"Oh, I seldom make a mistake in my reasoning," complaisantly declared Keene.

"Go on and tell me how you figured out the rest of the affair."

"Well, I worked backward to the start. Now I have the whole case before me. This man Ryswick is a scoundrel, and the girl is an adventuress. They are leagued for the purpose of working some man of wealth, and they may have succeeded with several. Enos Gregory was the rock on which they split."

Keene spoke confidently, as if there was not the least doubt in his mind.

"Ryswick got to know Gregory some way, and, at the proper time, just when the broker needed a type-writer girl, he brought the so-called Mabel Hasty forward. Everything went, and the girl secured the situation. Straightway, with all the skill of which she was capable, she began to work on Enos Gregory's susceptibilities. She succeeded, and he visited her here at this flat, where he passed as her father."

"You cannot be certain of that. You are trusting a great deal to speculation."

"That is necessary, but it is impossible that I have made any mistake. This girl led the man on, and he fell into the net that had been spread for him."

"Mr. Gregory is a husband and a father, Mr. Keene. You are putting him in a bad light."

"You must be fresher than I supposed to think his home relations made any difference with him if he is like the average New Yorker. These men with wives and families who have white in their hair and a copulent bank account are the choice victims

of blackmailers, and, pitiful though it is, they are often the most easy to catch."

"You will remember how confused the broker became in his statements. At first, he declared it was a case of self-defense, and then he afterward claimed Ryswick had committed suicide. Something you do not know is that Gregory absolutely denied knowing Mabel Hasty's address. And yet it was from his lips you and I learned how to find this place. If the man had done nothing wrong, there would have been no cause for duplicity."

"When Ryswick and the girl had fully obtained the hold they sought, they sprung the snare. That was this morning and in the broker's office. By the way, let me add that the absence of the office boy looks suspicious."

"Of course I do not know exacaly what snap they tried to work on the man, but it is plain they made a mistake in thinking he would knuckle easily to them. It is pretty certain they demanded hush-money, and threatened an exposure if it was not promptly forthcoming."

"You will remember Gregory's safe was standing open when we entered his office. It seems to me that he had opened it as if to comply with the demands of the blackmailers. What brought about the struggle is not plain. Possibly he revolted and leaped upon Ryswick."

"Gregory is a powerful man, and I fancy Ryswick found him no mean antagonist. If the revolver was not in truth the broker's, and he swore it was not, then it is possible Ryswick drew it. Gregory may have wrenched it from the hand of the other, sent Ryswick reeling away and fired as the man fell. The surgeon stated the bullet struck the man in the back of the head, and the muzzle of the revolver was more than one foot distant when the shot was fired."

"Now, isn't that simple enough?"

Hawk smiled.

"It is certainly very simple," he said, a double meaning hidden in his words. "But there are some things you have forgotten."

"What?"

"First, that the revolver was thrown out of the window."

"I did not forget it. That does not alter the aspect of the case. Hearing us coming and being somewhat rattled, Enos Gregory flung it through the window to get rid of it."

"Second, the cartridge had been extracted from the chamber of the weapon."

"Very simple. Could be done in a moment."

"Third, the weapon had been cleaned."

"A brush with a handkerchief would do that. Why didn't I think to examine Gregory for a handkerchief soiled with powder smoke stains?"

"You wouldn't have found it. Have you the revolver at hand?"

"Here it is."

Hawk took it and threw it open, saying:

"Glance through that barrel. You will see that it has been thoroughly cleaned since the shot was fired, for it is bright as a new silver dollar. Enos Gregory had no time to carefully clean his weapon after firing that shot."

"Well, how the dickens did it come to be clean then?"

"Ah! you are asking questions now, not offering solutions. A moment ago, you had the whole case worked out from the start to finish. You kindly volunteered to explain it to me that I might benefit thereby, and I thank you. But the matter of this revolver remains a riddle to you."

"Perhaps you have solved it?" sneered Keene, nettled.

"Perhaps I have."

Hawk was exasperatingly cool.

And now Abel Keene pranced about the room in anything but a graceful manner, puffing and grunting, pressing his pudgy lips together and scowling horribly.

"There is a part of this affair that you have not touched," The Hawk went on, taking something from his pocket. "This affair is more complex than you imagine, Mr. Keene, trusting you will pardon me for telling you so to your face. I propose to do my level best to whip you on this affair, and I think I shall succeed. I don't mind setting

you right on one point. Here is the bullet that popped Mr. Judah Ryswick over. Examine it."

With a growl, the portly detective took the battered piece of lead and glanced at it. He started, asking:

"Are you sure this is the bullet? Where did you get it?"

"Dug it out of the woodwork of the door of Gregory's office, where it had lodged after plowing along Ryswick's skull."

"It's not heavy enough to come from a cartridge used in this revolver."

"Exactly."

"Then—"

"Then this was not the revolver used."

CHAPTER IX.

VAIN SPECULATIONS.

"By Jove!"

The exclamation came from the lips of the portly detective as he scowled at the revolver and then at the bullet he held in his fingers.

Hawk smiled.

"In fact," he said, "this revolver seems to have intruded itself for the express purpose of making the matter complex. I was unable to discover any marking upon it to indicate its owner."

"There must be another revolver somewhere," burst from Keene.

"There is."

"You know it?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I have the revolver."

It was with some difficulty Abel Keene refrained from expressing his anger.

"You concealed the fact from me, McKnight!"

"My dear sir, I did not discover the revolver until after you had disappeared. Even had I found it before, I was not in duty bound to show it to you."

Keene did not fancy this, but Hawk apparently had not the least awe for the pompous detective.

"Where did you find the revolver? I noticed you had vanished from the office."

"I went out by the window and the fire-escape again."

"And the revolver—"

"I found it under the broken window, not far from where I picked up the other. It was hidden from my eyes in the first place by a bit of rubbish."

"And this bullet—"

"Came from revolver No. 2."

"It had been fired?"

"Yes."

"How many times?"

"Only once, and it had not been cleaned. Here it is." He took the weapon from his pocket, all carefully wrapped in a piece of newspaper, and passed it to Abel Keene.

The veteran detective eagerly inspected the handsome little weapon, his keen eyes glittering and his thick lips working.

"This is a lady's toy!" he finally cried.

"So it appears," agreed The Hawk.

"But it makes just exactly one revolver too many!"

"That is what I said. Luckily it was this revolver from which the bullet came—that is, it is lucky for Judah Ryswick."

"You think the heavier ball would have killed him, instead of glancing on his skull?"

"I haven't a doubt of it."

Keene continued to examine the pretty little weapon, and he soon exclaimed:

"It is marked!"

"So I observed."

"The lettering is very fine, and the letters are 'L. B.'"

"Yes."

Keene's eyes lifted from the revolver to the inscrutable face of the independent detective.

"Hang it all, man!" he cried; "why don't you express an idea? You're not devoid of them, I know."

"Thank you," drawled Hawk. "I was leaving the expression of ideas to you; you are remarkably quick at solutions of such difficult problems."

The regular scowled, for, somehow, he did not like the words or the tone of the other. If there was anything Abel Keene despised it was to be laughed at.

"This is not the kind of a weapon either

Ryswick or Gregory would be likely to carry," he finally observed.

"That is evident."

"Say, McKnight, who is the owner of this toy?"

"You say."

Keene scowled and thumped his forehead, and then, all at once, he burst into a chuckling laugh that shook his fat chin.

"Simple—simple as can be!" was his declaration. "I see through it all now."

"Then I trust you will remove the scales from my eyes."

"In a moment, young man," and the portly detective was patronizing once more. "I'll wager this revolver belongs to Miss Mabel Hasty, otherwise known as Mrs. Claxton, the initials to whose rightful name are probably L. B. What do you think of that?"

"But you do not fancy she threw the revolver out of the window?"

"By no means! I see the whole affair now. I see this man Ryswick and this woman demand hush-money of Enos Gregory—I see the old broker apparently give in and then suddenly turn like a tiger on Ryswick—I see them grapple—Ryswick draws a revolver—Gregory grasps his wrist and keeps him from using it—then Miss Mabel Hasty takes a hand. Do you follow me?"

"Go on."

"The girl is in love with Ryswick, and she attempts to defend him, as the old broker has the rascal by the throat. She gets out her own revolver and thrusts it into Gregory's face. He wrenches it from her grasp, and then she runs into the street, crying that he has a revolver and will murder Ryswick. Why, it's the simplest thing in the world!"

"It seems to me you are inclined to jump rather swiftly at conclusions for a man who has been a detective so many years."

Keene did not like that, and he growled and gurgled in his fat throat, as he scowled at the Dapper Detective.

"Well, if you have a better explanation, let's hear it."

"I have not been able to arrive at a conclusion thus easily, sir."

"A man's wits have to work swiftly in this business else he'd be no good outside a private detective bureau."

But this handful of mud did not seem to hit Hawk at all, for he never gave it the slightest heed.

"If your surmisal is correct," he said, "Enos Gregory must have thrown both the revolvers out of the window after Ryswick was shot, and they must have both passed through that one broken pane of glass."

"Well?"

"It was a very silly thing for him to do, and a man of his intelligence should have known it. The plea of self-defense would have stood had Judah Ryswick been found with a revolver in his grasp or by his side, while the broker had another revolver."

"He was rattled—he didn't know what he was doing. That is a simple explanation of the action."

"Perhaps."

Hawk arose and called in the Irish servant girl.

"My dear," he said, with a winning smile that betrayed beneath his mustache a glimpse of snowy-white teeth, "I want you to look at this revolver and see if you ever saw it or one like it in Mrs. Claxton's possession."

"There is nary nade fer me to look, sur."

"Why not?"

"Because Mrs. Claxton is thot scared av a revolver, she near faints at the sight av wan. There was none kipt around the house, Oi'll give me word."

But, that did not convince Abel Keene at all. He had reasoned it out so easily that he could not readily abandon his theory.

They were about to leave the flat when the bell rung, and a tall, gray-bearded gentleman was admitted.

"Be me saoull!" cried the servant girl; "it's Mrs. Claxton's fayther!"

Abel Keene took one square look at the man, who was an entire stranger to both detectives, and then uttered a gurgle of anger.

Hawk smiled a trifle.

CHAPTER X.

THE MAN FROM CHICAGO.

"Hang it!"

It may have been something more forcible

that came from the portly detective's lips, but "hang it" looks better in print.

Without delay, Abel Keene pounced upon the stranger.

"Look here, sir!" he cried; "who are you?"

And the man promptly retorted:

"That is none of your business!"

"Have a care, sir—have a care!" fumed the regular, who was exasperated by having a portion of his theory thus knocked to smithereens before the eyes of the private detective he had been trying to impress. "You may get yourself into trouble, sir!"

"Will you stand aside and permit me to enter?" came commandingly from the stranger's lips.

Hawk touched Keene on the elbow, and the wrathful detective took the hint. The man was permitted to enter, and Hawk turned the key in the lock of the door.

"Now, sir," said Keene, attempting to make an impression, "I assure you it will be to your advantage to answer our questions promptly and truthfully."

The gray-bearded man turned on them, his face betraying his wrath, as he cried:

"Confound your insolence! Do you dare talk to me like this in my own flat? What is your business here, anyway? I'll call the police and have you both arrested!"

If his rage was simulated, he was certainly a very good actor, for he seemed thoroughly in earnest.

"You will not do very much at calling the police," returned Keene, as he flipped open his coat and showed his badge. "We are both detectives."

"Detectives?" The man's face expressed more astonishment than alarm.

"Exactly," grunted the portly officer, "and you will do well to keep off your high horse while we are around, mister. We have a little business with you."

"With me? Impossible!"

"I guess not!"

"What can you want here?"

"That you will find out in time. You say this is your flat?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you own the building?"

"I simply rent the flat."

"Furnished?"

"Yes. But I want to know something about this business. Why should I answer all these questions? Be kind enough to tell me what has happened."

"I assure you it is something very serious."

"Mrs. Claxton—"

"You do not say 'my daughter.'"

For the first time, the stranger was confused. He tore off his gloves nervously and would have called the servant, who had discreetly retired to the kitchen.

Hawk stopped him.

"I trust you will have the goodness to pardon us," came pleasantly from the lips of the smiling detective. "I give you my assurance that we regret very much putting you to the slightest inconvenience, but it is absolutely necessary. We are endeavoring to get at the truth of a very unfortunate affair, and you may be able to assist us."

Magnetism and politeness won, and the gentleman turned, retorting:

"Now you are putting it in a different light. Your friend there is given to bulldozing, it seems, and if there is anything in this work I will not endure it is bulldozing. I am sure I do not know what all the fuss is about, but if I can give you any information, I am at your service. You would do me a kindness to enlighten me as to what has happened."

"You shall know in a very few moments. In the first place, why have you permitted an adventuress to pose as your daughter?"

"An adventuress?"

"Exactly."

"Mrs. Claxton?"

"It seems she is known here as Mrs. Claxton. She has other names."

"What has she done? Am I to be wrung into a scandal? I am a respectable man, sir, and whose business is it if I see fit to befriend a pretty widow like Mrs. Claxton?"

"Then she poses at home as a widow?"

"She gave me to understand she was such."

"Did you believe her?"

"I didn't ask any questions, for I did not

care. She is a very pretty young woman, and I have money. I am unmarried. As you are detectives, you will discover all these things upon investigation, and I may as well tell them to you now. My name is Otis Day, and I am from Chicago."

Hawk bowed.

"I thank you very much, Mr. Day. Where did you first meet this Miss Claxton?"

"On a New York Central train, as I was coming in from Chicago. We became acquainted by accident, and she told me she was a widow. She was dressed in half-mourning. But, what has she done? I will know that before I answer another question."

"She is mixed up with a down-town murder case," put in Abel Keene, and Hawk scowled.

The man from Chicago uttered an exclamation of dismay, turning pale and falling back in a manner that convinced the independent detective he knew nothing of the unfortunate affair in Enos Gregory's office.

"When did this happen?"

"To-day."

"To-day? Why she should be at her lessons."

"What lessons?"

"She is training for the stage—at least, she told me so."

"When does she take her lessons?"

"Well, she asked me not to call at the flat before four in the afternoon. I came early to-day for reasons I will not mention."

"Well, while this very slick young lady was supposed by you to be taking lessons for the stage she was, in fact, at work in a certain broker's office as type-writer."

The man from Chicago was astounded.

"Impossible! You have made a mistake, gentlemen! Why should she work when she has all the money she can blow in if she simply asks for it? There is an error here."

"Her object was not to earn money as a type-writer, by any means. The young lady is an adventuress, and the man for whom she tapped the keys is wealthy. It seems that while you were playing the angel for her she was looking after bigger game."

Otis Day's face reddened the least trifle and he began to pull on his gloves again.

"I scarcely thought that of her," he said, disgust written on his face. "Of course I understood she was a trifle swift, but I scarcely fancied her an adventuress. She really seemed one of the innocent would-be-wicked sort. How was she connected with this unfortunate shooting?"

"That is what we are trying to get at."

But there was little more to be learned from Otis Day. He seemed to think he had talked too much already, and was soon ready to leave the flat.

Hawk wondered just what course Abel Keene would pursue, but soon discovered it was the intention of the portly detective to remain at the flat until the missing female appeared and then arrest her on some petty charge by which she could be held until the full truth was known.

"You will waste your time," said the independent detective, speaking guardedly to Keene. "The woman will not come back here."

"What makes you think so?"

"I do not think—I know it! I know where to put my hand on her, and that is my secret. You will let a point slip if you do not find out if this Otis Day has told the truth. If it were not that I have other work in view, I would follow him myself."

Keene knew Hawk was right, and as there was no hope of making a catch by remaining at the flat, he shadowed the man from Chicago when that person departed.

Although Hawk was not at all satisfied with Keene's explanation of the shooting, he believed Mabel Hasty could disclose information of importance if inclined to do so. How to induce her to talk without having her arrested and putting on the screws was what puzzled the Dapper Detective.

He had hoped by skillful work to get the complete truth from Enos Gregory, for whom he would recover the papers if thus instructed. But Gregory's injury had proved serious, and the man might not speak a rational word for days, which would give the adventuress and her brother plenty of time to vanish with the papers.

He decided to get after Miss Mabel Hasty

without delay, not even waiting to satisfy his hunger, which was now acute, as it was getting along in the afternoon and he had not eaten since early morning.

Straight to the Third avenue hotel Hawk made his way, having decided not to beat about the bush in the least. He would play a stiff game of bluff, and if he did not get the papers, he would take the girl. Not only that, he would have the girl arrested anyway.

But he was too late. She had vanished from the hotel, as if forewarned of danger!

CHAPTER XI.

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCES.

THE HAWK was astounded.

How could the precious pair have taken the alarm?

He was not sure they had actually left for good until the following morning, when it became evident they would not return.

No one about the hotel seemed to know them or care what had become of them.

They had brought no baggage, but the young fellow paid the bill for three days in advance, which indicated it was his original intention to remain there for that length of time, at least.

That they had vanished so suddenly and mysteriously indicated they had been alarmed.

Hawk began to think it possible he was shadowed himself.

In that case, he would have to resort to disguises.

But the coming of another day brought him surprising news.

Judah Ryswick had disappeared!

Some time during the night he had vanished from the hospital, and, as he had been quiet for hours before, it was not learned he was gone until near morning.

How he had made his way out was a mystery, for the attendants and guards all swore they had seen nothing of him, and it was declared he could not have escaped to the street without being observed by some one.

Then what had become of him?

Here was another mystery.

Ryswick had apparently remained unconscious until a late hour, and when he had finally shown signs of returning life and reason, he sunk into a peaceful slumber.

It was plain he had not been constantly attended through the night, or the attendant had fallen asleep.

The latter was said to have been the case.

Perhaps, deranged by the shock of the bullet, he had noiselessly arisen and sneaked out of the hospital.

This seemed the only explanation of his vanishing.

The moment he heard of the remarkable occurrence, Hawk was perplexed.

"If I could make myself double!" he exclaimed. "Here are two matters that demand immediate attention, and either is enough for one man. Somebody should work out the mystery of Ryswick's vanishing, and at the same time, some one should be tracing the missing adventuress and her supposed brother. Oh, well! I shall have to trust the Ryswick matter to the police. They will do their best to find out what has become of the man, and they have not a trace of Mrs. Claxton. I must look after her."

But it was no easy matter to get track of a frightened woman who had vanished in a city like New York and plainly knew the town.

Hawk, in the disguise of an Irish laborer, had appeared at the Third avenue hotel once more just as the street lamps were being lighted.

A street gamin, who had been lounging on the curb, came up and looked him over.

"You ain't de feller," said the boy, shaking his head with disappointment.

"Begorra! Oi loike thot!" exclaimed Hawk; whose make-up was perfect so long as he could keep his small hands unnoticed.

"How do ye know Oi ain't the felly?"

"G'won!" retorted the gamin, in disgust. "Feller I'm lookin' fer wears patent-leather boots, white shirt an' silk tile. Den he's got a jo-jumper of a mustache."

Hawk had worn a handsome false mustache the day before, it being his policy never to appear exactly as he would look without

disguise. The mustache was so finely made and so perfectly attached that nothing but the scrutiny of a barber could have betrayed the fact that it was not natural.

"That's th' way Oi look whin Oi'm dressed up," assured Hawk. "Oi'm th' felly."

"Rats!"

The detective grabbed the boy by the collar.

"Oi tell ye Oi'm th' felly!" he repeated.

"Now, look here. Tell me what ye want av th' chap an' Oi'll be afther givin' ye a quarther."

"Show de scad."

Hawk produced a quarter.

"Pay in advance," insisted the boy, and the detective surrendered the money.

"Well, de feller dat I'm lookin' after is a detective," said the street gamin. "Anyway, dat's w'ot I heard round de hotel. An' he's lookin' fer a cove an' a gal w'ot skipped de coop widout sayin' good-by."

"Well?"

"Well, I know a feller w'ot knows where dey be."

This was certainly interesting.

"Well, begorra! Oi think it's thot soame pair Oi'm lookin' fer meself," said Hawk. "It's money they owe me, th' divils; an' Oi'll give an aven dollar to foind out where they hiv gone."

"Show de plunk."

The detective brought out a bright silver dollar, at sight of which the gamin's eyes glittered.

"It's a trade!" he cried. "I'll take yer to de feller w'ot knows where dey be if you'll give me dat shiner."

"An' thin th' other felly'll refuse to show me where they be. Oh, no! ye can't catch Moike McGarrity loike thot! Take me to this other felly, an' av he agrees to take me to th' thaves av th' world, it's a go."

This was agreed on, and they started, the gamin showing the way.

Hawk questioned the boy as they proceeded, but all he could learn was that another boy had followed the wanted pair and located them. This other boy had found out Hawk was a detective, and for that reason he had watched the suspected pair. Having holed them, he had engaged the street gamin to find Hawk, whom he described as the detective had appeared on the day of the mysterious shooting.

The gamin knew every street and alley, and he led McKnight through some dark lonely quarters on the East Side. It seemed that Mrs. Claxton and her brother had decided to bury themselves where they would not be easily found.

At length, they came to a corner where another boy was standing as if waiting for them. It was dark there, the street light provided by the city having been ruined by toughs, but Hawk's keen eyes made out that the second boy was not nearly as shabbily dressed as the gamin. He had both hands thrust deep in his pockets and was smoking a cigarette.

"Hi, dere!" called Hawk's escort.

"Hi, there!" came back. "Is that you, Bat?"

"Sure."

"Got him?"

"No. Got another feller w'ot shoves up a dollar if we'll put him onter the same gang."

The second boy uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"Oh, what's the matter with yer!" he cried. "It's the detective I want. He'll pay more than a dollar."

"By me saoul! Oi'll give two dollars meself!" promptly declared Hawk.

"Dat's a dollar apiece!" gurgled the first boy, delighted at the prospect.

The second boy said nothing, but he keenly inspected the disguised ferret.

"He's got de scads, dough he don't look it," assured the first boy, apparently fearing his companion would doubt the man's ability to pay. "Make him cough up in advance."

"What do you want of that feller and girl for?" questioned the lad with the cigarette.

"They owe me money, an' Oi'm ready to pay two dollars to take it out of thim."

"Well, I'll take you to them for two dollars. You can pay this other kid w'ot ye likes. I'm the one as knows where they are."

Hawk was obliged to part with a silver dollar in order to quiet the gamin, and then he accompanied boy No. 2, who warned the first one not to "chase."

The second boy did not seem inclined to talk a great deal.

"Wot's yer name, me b'y?" he asked.

"Tim Jones."

"Where do ye live?"

"On Fifth avenue, just above Madison Square," promptly lied the fly youth. "My father is a Wall street broker."

"An' is that the truth now!" cried Hawk, as if greatly impressed. "It's meself as resides on South Fifth avenue a bit below Blaker strate. The neighborhood is nart jist as select as Oi would loike, but Oi'm nart wan thot mixes wid common papple a great d'ale."

"I should say not by your appearance."

For all of Hawk's skillful questioning, he could get very little that was satisfactory from the boy, who was an adept at lying.

The detective knew the quarter through which they were passing had anything but a respectable reputation, but it was the hour when the largest number of people are stirring, and he did not apprehend the possibility of trouble until they turned down a dark and foul smelling alley.

Hawk's hand had crept back to see if his revolver was handy, when, of a sudden, the boy gave a shrill cry and darted away in the darkness.

Two men rose up from the shadows and launched themselves at the Dapper Detective.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BATTLE IN BLOOD ALLEY.

NOT a word or a sound did either of the disguised detective's assailants utter as they leaped like lurking tigers upon him.

The cry and sudden flight of the boy was calculated to hold Hawk's attention, but it happened, as this was an unusual action, instinct caused him to glance swiftly around.

That glance saved his life.

He saw the two dark forms right upon him, coming from opposite sides of the alley, and he saw there was no time for flight. There were weapons in the hands of both men, and the detective was empty-handed. Should he pause to draw a weapon, he would be cut to the ground.

His own efforts alone could save him, and it seemed scarcely probable this slender, graceful man, unarmed and unprepared, would be the match of two lurking assassins who had sprung on him at a chosen moment considered most favorable for the success of their murderous project.

As upon many another occasion, his nerve and quick wit saved him.

Down to his knees he dropped at the very moment when the hands of his foes seemed to touch him.

As a result of this sudden move, the two thugs plunged into each other's arms.

One of them uttered a curse, while a cry of pain came from the lips of the other.

"I'm cut!"

Then up between them rose the slippery detective, his arms flinging them reeling to the right and left.

"I'll bore him!" grated the uninjured one, and then there was a blaze of light and the sharp report of a revolver.

The words and the movement of the man's arm had warned Hawk, and the detective leaped and squirmed aside.

Too late, it seemed, for he went plunging heavily down on his face.

His fall was revealed by the flash of the shot, and a cry of triumphant satisfaction broke from the lips of the man with the revolver.

For an instant after the shot the fellow was blinded, and then he lifted his weapon to make sure of his game.

Even as the murderous rascal did this, a cry of warning came from the lips of the one who had been accidentally stabbed:

"Don't shoot, pal!"

The detective, far from being injured, had simply stumbled and fallen in his effort to avoid the bullet of the murderous thug, and it is possible that fall was what saved him, for the bullet knocked the old hat from his head.

Up to his feet he shot, as if worked by springs, and, with one bound, caught the wounded ruffian in his arms, holding the fellow before him as a shield.

Then came the thug's warning cry.

Hawk ran forward with the fellow's feet lifted clear of the ground, and, when he was right upon the man with the revolver, he gave the other one a fling that sent him heavily to the ground.

The thug with the weapon felt his pistol hand thrust upward just as he was pulling trigger, and a snarl grated from his lips as he realized the bullet had been wasted on empty air.

He had dropped his knife at the moment he felt it slash through the clothing of his pal, and now he had no weapon for a hand-to-hand encounter.

But hand-to-hand the fight must be, and he realized it instantly, so he dropped the revolver and grappled with the disguised detective, attempting to throw the ferret with one swift, strong, sudden surge.

"Begorra! it's roight to home Oi am this minute!" cried Hawk, still keeping up his character, for he did not know the disguise had been penetrated. He soon found out the truth, however, for the thug hissed:

"You make a fine Irishman, Hawk McKnight; but you'll make a great deal better stiff! It's me or you!"

"In that case," promptly asserted Hawk,

"It will be *you*, dear boy."

"Not by a dern sight!"

The detective soon discovered the fellow was muscular and quick of movement, and the battle was a furious one while it lasted. Twice the thug called on his comrade to get up and take a hand, but the other man lay just where Hawk had cast him, evidently stunned.

The detective was a great deal stronger and harder to down than he looked, for he had kept himself in perfect trim all his life and never abused himself in any way. He was one of those deceptive men who look graceful but lacking in muscular development and who invariably surprise those who attempt to down them.

"You have a back!" panted the thug. "You're better than I took ye for, but you'll never get out of Blood Alley with a whole skin!"

Blood Alley! Hawk started when he heard the name, for it told him he was in one of the vilest quarters of the East Side. More murders had been committed in Blood Alley than in any other such section of the city, and a smaller number of the assassins had been captured and punished. It was nothing startling any morning to find a corpse in the alley, and the efforts of the city to have the place cleared of its depraved inhabitants had proved futile.

It was said that one of the worst gangs in the city since the extinction of the Whyos had its headquarters somewhere in or about Blood Alley. More than once, Hawk had resolved to begin work on that vile quarter and see if he could not put an end to the gang and the murdering that was going on there, but other matters had prevented his attending to this.

He wondered how it was he had not recognized the alley, as he had once passed through it in the daytime, but he was given little time to speculate.

A shrill, peculiar whistle sounded from the lips of the thug, and Hawk knew it was a signal. The detective attempted to get hold of the man's throat so it could not be repeated, but a second signal was given.

"I'll have the gang on ye in less than a minute!" panted the ruffian.

As these words left his lips, from some upper story window a strong light was shot down on the writhing men. It came from a reflector and showed them plainly.

Hawk knew he was in great peril, and, with one fierce twist, he got his assailant foul, holding the fellow bent backward. The light fell full on the thug's face, and the detective uttered an exclamation that was more of satisfaction than surprise, for he recognized his foe.

It was the brother of the mysterious Mrs. Claxton—the thief who had stolen the valuable papers from Enos Gregory as the broker lay senseless on Broadway!

"So it is *you*!" came from Hawk's lips; and then, with wonderful swiftness, one of

the detective's hands began to run through Bob's pockets.

Whistles sounded in front and behind! The clatter of running feet awoke the echoes of the alley! The gang was coming!

Realizing not another instant was to be lost if he would escape with his life, the ferret dashed his conquered foe to the ground and started to dart away.

The white, round glare of light, shooting down from that window, followed his movements, exposing him to the view of the gathering crooks and ruffians.

To the right and left Hawk darted, but the light followed him, and cries from the gang sounded close at hand.

Suddenly he realized he held in his hand the revolver he had wrested from the murderous Bob. Like a flash, he whirled and fired.

The bullet sped true. There was a crash of glass and then darkness in the alley.

He had shot out the light!

But the thugs were right upon him, and it seemed already too late to get away.

As a dark figure leaped at him, he once more tried the trick of dropping suddenly, and found it successful, for the man went plunging down on his face.

Like a cat, the detective ran along on all fours close to a wall and huddled in the dark corner by a doorstep as two more black figures went running past. He instantly started on again, but he was not near any cover when he saw three more men right upon him.

He would surely be discovered, so he whirled right back on his course and arose to an upright position.

"Wot's der row?" called one of the men, seeing him moving along before them in the same direction. "Who's shootin'?"

"Cuss a fool that don't know better'n to be shootin' here!" snarled a second.

"It's apt to bring the coppers down on de run," put in the third.

Hawk wheeled as if to reply, and the three men were close at hand. Fairly into the face of one of them he flung the heavy revolver, knocking the fellow down instantly. At the same time, his right foot flew out and struck a second fair in the middle, doubling the rascal up like a jack-knife. He struck the third man between the eyes with his fist, bowling him over.

Then this remarkable detective, who seemed to be right on his muscle that night, darted away along the alley.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRAMPS' RESORT.

Hawk fully realized he had been decoyed to that alley for a dark purpose. He now saw that not even his disguise had hidden his identity from his foes.

And the two boys, the street gamin and the cigarette-smoker, had played their part like veteran actors, for certain it was they had known him all along.

He was not a little puzzled by this, as it was an unusual experience in his life, and for the first time his disguise had been easily and readily penetrated.

He was not given much time for thought or speculation, but something told him he had been shadowed to his rooms, and, in that manner, when the Irishman came forth the shadower knew it must be the detective.

Mrs. Claxton and her ruffianly brother were fully aware the ferret had spotted them, and Bob, with the true instincts of a thug, had resolved to put Hawk out of the way. This showed the fellow was most desperate and would halt at nothing. It also seemed to indicate a violent fear of arrest.

All this made it seem probable the adventures knew more about the shooting in Enos Gregory's office than she had confessed to the policemen on the sidewalk.

Could it be she had shot Judah Ryswick herself? Was it possible Ryswick had discovered an intrigue between the woman and Enos Gregory and had made a scene in the office?

It seemed this might have been arranged between the man and the woman, only it was strange a better opportunity for carrying their plot into execution had not been chosen.

And if it had been thus arranged, either

the woman turned against Ryswick at the last moment and shot him deliberately, if she shot him at all, or she threatened Gregory with the revolver and had the weapon snatched from her grasp by the broker.

This latter supposition seemed the more probable.

On finding herself thus disarmed, she had rushed from the office to the street, calling on the policemen who happened to be at hand.

But, if she had done no shooting, why was she in such terror of arrest? If she was innocent of anything more than an attempt at blackmail, heinous though it were, she would scarcely resort to the desperate scheme of having the detective put out of the way.

It was possible Bob had taken the entire responsibility on his shoulders and decoyed Hawk to Blood Alley without the knowledge of his sister.

The attempt to kill The Hawk had proved a failure, although the fighting detective was not yet out of the alley.

As he fled for the street, hearing the cries of the baffled gang behind him, of a sudden, to the right a door was opened and a yellow flare of light shone out into the alley. Beyond the door he saw a bar that was surrounded on three sides by as tough and degraded appearing set of human beings as it had ever been his fortune to look upon.

"That's Rut Murphy's den," thought Hawk, as he hurried on.

He had once visited Volta's resort for tramps in Mulberry street, where he saw a most wretched collection of human beings, and it was said that Murphy's place in Blood Alley was of a still lower order than Volta's.

Once past Murphy's, he found no trouble in getting out of the alley.

It was less than an hour after this that the door of Rut Murphy's den opened and a most disreputable appearing vagabond slouched in.

The first thing the new-comer noticed was a rank and offensive smell of grease, tobacco, sour beer and poor rum. However, he did not seem to mind that at all, any more than the wretched throng gathered about the bar, fair samples of whom can be seen lounging about City Hall Park during the daytime.

Behind the bar was a hard-faced, iron-jawed man who was dealing out drinks, his sleeves rolled up and the butt of a black cigar in his mouth. The cigar had gone out some hours before, but he was still chewing on it, while he dispensed drinks as if his occupation was the most serious and dignified employment in the world.

About the room were kegs and board benches, on which were lolling the frequenters of the place, the most of them being able-bodied men. Some of them were asleep in various positions, and the faces of all were devoid of expression, unless it was that of perfect and utter besottedness and abandonment.

With the men at the bar a coal-black but decently dressed negress was drinking whisky. She was not more than twenty-three or four years old, and was the most respectable person to be seen in the place. But her jokes with the bartender told that she was also a frequenter of this wretched resort, and, indeed, that was plain from the fact that the regular customers of the place paid very little attention to her.

The smell of grease came from the free lunch counter at the further end of the room, where an Italian was dipping out basins of a thick, vile-smelling liquid that sent up clouds of steam to mingle with the fumes of tobacco and sour beer. As fast as the basins were filled they were eagerly seized by the men who gathered about the counter, and the contents of each were disposed of in a hurry.

The latest-comer in this lair of the slums slouched up to the bar and called for whisky, at the same time fishing in his pocket and producing three cents, one at a time. In return for the three coppers he was given a brimming glass of dark colored stuff that looked and smelled like rank poison.

The tramp eagerly seized his glass, but he was so excited he upset it and the liquid ran over the bar.

A cry of dismay came from the man's lips. "Look at that!" he wailed, his eyes glaring at the overturned liquid. "Only earned

thirty-six cents workin' suckers with the sick an' out of work gag, an' now I lose a whole glass of good whisky! Say, boss, won't ye fill 'er up again?" he pleaded.

"Go on!" snarled the hard-faced bar-keeper. "Whisk is tree cents a glass here. I didn't slop the can. If you gits more, you'll pay fer it. See? If you don't want more, git back an' let some other cove have a show at der bar."

"An' me an old sojer in the war!" mumbled the unfortunate tramp, falling back ruefully. "This is the way the Government treats its defenders. Jest as shure as my name's Jim Snooks, if there was to be another war, I'd—I'd—enlist!"

Having thus expressed himself, Jim Snooks retired to a keg, produced the remains of a half-smoked cigar from his pocket and lighted it. He did not ask for a basin of the "soup," which must have seemed surprising to those who were in the habit of lounging about the place.

The nearest neighbor to Mr. Snooks was a cheerful looking beggar, who had a rather intelligent face. This man looked sharply at the "old sojer," and then asked:

"Just in, mate?"

"No," was the reply; "just out—three cents."

"I mean just in from the road."

"Yep."

"What circuit?"

"Southern—New Orleans, Savannah, Washington, Baltimore and Philadelphia."

"Seems to me you're strikin' in the wrong direction for this time of the year. You'd oughter be gettin' south, instead of gettin' north. Winter's comin'."

"I'm goin' to spend the winter in Californy."

"Ah! Any particular part?"

"Oh, down Santa Barbara way. I shall visit all the swell resorts. Californy is the place in winter. Better come out to my villa at Pomona, mate."

"Thanks, awful. I've got to go to Floridy to look after my orange groves down there.—What did you say your name was?"

"James B. Snooks, sergeant-at arms in the stenth brigade of Pennysulvany Recruits. I fit all through the war."

"In what battles?"

"Well, we had battles all over the house after I came back home. To tell you the truth, I took leave without asking, and my wife tried to drive me back. I left her after some eighteen or twenty pitched battles, and I have been wandering from my fireside ever since. My wife has married again, and now I draw a regular pension."

"A pension? An' you deserted?"

"From the army. I draw the pension from my wife. She was surprised to see me alive and kickin' one day about a year after she had hitched to this other man, an' now she pays me five dollars a month reg'ler to keep my mouth still an' not let on that I ain't dead."

"Partner, what do you do when you receive that V?"

"Oh, I alwus treat my friends."

"I'm stickin' to you after this like a burr. We'll whack in an' go to Californy together, if ye say so."

"All right, I want company of a select sort.—I'm bound to git shot some day, and I want a pard to see I'm planted with proper *cclaw*. Excuse me. That is French. Possibly you do not speak French? I came very near being shot this night, and my only desire was to get half-shot."

"I s'pose you must have been comin' along when the row was? Did you see it?"

"Not much of it. Soon as the bullet came over my way I sat down in the shade just back of a door step, where there wasn't any chance of encountering lead. What was it all about?"

"I dunno. One feller got cut. Him an' his mate is in the next room back, along with Rut Murphy an' Doc Smith."

This was interesting information for Mr. James B. Snooks, but he did not show it on his face or in his actions.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MAN OF NERVE.

MR. JAMES B. SNOOKS was none other than Hawk McKnight in another disguise!

The detective had made a quick shift and

returned to the alley to get track of Bob or the boy Tim Jones, if possible. In that way he hoped to track down the mysterious Mrs. Claxton.

His make-up was good, and one could scarcely have taken him for anything but what he seemed, a tramp among tramps. In appearance he was as wretched, dirty and degraded as the average frequenter of Rut Murphy's dive.

The news that the fellow he had wounded was in the back room of the resort was decidedly interesting. That the thug's "mate" was also there was still more interesting, for, of course, the fellow known as Bob was meant.

He was not long in doubt. A door opened, and Rut Murphy came in. He was a big, square-jawed Irishman, dressed in a vulgar and flashy manner, a great contrast to the frequenters of his saloon.

Murphy was followed by the man known as Doc Smith. He was one of the unfortunate men who live by charity, but his face, although marked by drink, showed he was an intelligent and capable man. It was said he had once been a prosperous and wealthy physician, but had fallen through his taste for drink.

Behind Smith came another man.

It was the fellow known as Bob!

"There they be," said the disguised detective's informant. "Of course you know Murphy an' Doc. The feller behind is one as was in the row. It was something over the fly spotters. It's a howlin' shame we gents can't be let alone by the police!"

"That's what!" nodded Hawk.

He kept his eyes on Bob, although he scarcely seemed to notice the young thug.

Bob was a rather good-looking fellow, fairly well dressed, but with a reckless and slightly vicious cast of countenance. Hawk could not see that he resembled the woman supposed to be his sister to any great extent.

Bob lined up to the bar with Murphy and the broken-down doctor, and, at a tip from the proprietor of the place, a special bottle of whisky was brought forth.

Hawk had a desire to hear their conversation, and he promptly arose and slouched over toward the bar. He knew he could not remain there unless he drank something, or pretended to, and he did not hesitate to call for something out of Murphy's special bottle.

"G'won!" exclaimed the barkeeper, glaring at him in disgust. "Are you rich?"

"Well, I think I've got stuff enough to pay for one square snifter outer that bottle," was the reply. "How much is it?"

"Ten cents a drink, an' fifteen if ye fills yer glass. Now git a move on!"

"Nary move, old sport. Here's yer dime."

He planked the ten-cent piece on the bar with a great flourish and reached for the bottle, but the barkeeper snatched it from his fingers, snarling:

"No yer don't! I'll do the turnin'. See?"

Hawk protested with an appearance of perfect sincerity, but he allowed the fellow to pour out the whisky. The glass was about one-half filled, and, although that was more than the disgusted detective would have taken if allowed to pour for himself, he grumbled at the amount.

In the mean time his ears were wide open, and he heard Doc Smith say:

"Guffin's all right. The cut ain't bad at all. But he says you gave it to him, Darcy?"

"That's what I did," confessed Bob. "But it was a mistake. I meant it fer the spotter."

"And who was this spotter you were laying for?"

"Hawk McKnight, curse him!"

"That's what I say," nodded Murphy, his eyes glowing angrily. "That's why I had the boy taken here to me place when I heard who ye was after. That fly has said he was comin' down here to clean out the alley, an' I'll give a helpin' hand to any man that throws him cold. It's a pity ye didn't do him up this night."

"I'll do him yet!" asserted Bob.

"Have you a special grudge against him?" asked Smith, eying the young rascal sharply.

"Well, he broke Dinny McSween, as I had a pull with, and he pinched Bat Thorne."

as was my side partner. Poor Bat got two years. If I don't do him, he'll have my photograph at Police Headquarters before the end of another twelve months."

"That's what he will, my fine lad," thought the listening detective. "You're spotted for the Rogues' Gallery."

"How ever did he give ye the slip?"

"He is the hardest man to throw in New York, and you mark that. I knew he was coming, and I gave Guffin an X to help me do him. We had the plan laid out so it didn't seem it could fail, and yet when we jumped for him he dropped just in time to let us into each other's arms, and I gave Guffin the knife. It's a wonder I didn't get Guffin's."

Rut Murphy smote the bar with his fist.

"An' he was down achune ye?"

"Yes."

"An' ye didn't get at him then?"

"No."

"It's not proud of yerself you should be, my boy."

Bob flushed.

"I tell you, you don't know Hawk McKnight," he protested. "He came up like a cyclone and began shooting at once. It's a howling wonder I'm not full of lead."

All this conversation was of very little real interest to Hawk, for it told him nothing he did not already know. He hoped Bob would mention the two boy decoys, but it was plainly the young thug's policy to keep dark the fact that the detective had not come to the alley for the purpose of "gettin' onter the gang."

The barkeeper had been watching the detective closely, not having recovered from his surprise at Hawk's strange behavior in buying a drink of ten-cent whisky when he might have obtained a glass full of the stuff usually sold over the counter for the sum of three cents.

But what surprised the barkeeper the most was the fact that Hawk did not seem to like the ten-cent whisky after he had obtained it.

The disguised detective barely touched the liquid to his lips, and then he covertly emptied it upon the sawdust-covered floor.

Although he did not appear to be looking that way, the tough barkeeper saw all this, and he nearly had a fit.

What kind of a bum was it who bought ten-cent whisky and then emptied it upon the floor?

The suspicion of the dispenser of drinks was thoroughly aroused, and, innocent though the disguised detective appeared, it increased with each passing moment.

He decided to investigate and discover if Mr. James B. Snooks was just what he appeared.

Suddenly darting a hand across the bar, he gave a snatch at the unkempt beard Hawk wore.

As the beard was false, it promptly came off in the grasp of the barkeeper.

Instantly realizing what had happened, the Dapper Detective leaped backward and cleared a space about him with one sweep of his arms.

A yell pealed from the lips of the barkeeper.

"Hey! Hi! Looker this! Here's a spotter pipin' us off!"

Among the tramps about the place were many ruffians and crooks who were wanted for crimes of greater or less magnitude, and the shout from the bartender created a sensation.

But Murphy gave a snarl of rage, while Doc Smith actually laughed at the row thus kicked up.

It was Bob Darcy, who, wheeling, recognized the unmasked detective.

"Ye gods!" he shouted, shaking a clinched fist above his head and pointing straight at Hawk with his other hand. "That's the fly spotter we tried to throw! That's Night Hawk, or I'm a liar!"

Night Hawk! Not a man in that dive but had heard of the daring, independent detective. A roar went up, and every sleepy bum was awake in an instant.

"Night Hawk! He's pipin' us off! Down him!"

But some of them were for getting outside and out of the detective's reach without delay. There were others, however, who were bolder and more desperate, and surged

around the unmasked detective, their evil designs written on their besotten faces.

After that first quick motion to clear the space about him, Hawk did not seem at all excited or alarmed. He leaned with one elbow on the bar, his right hand thrust carelessly into the side pocket of his ragged coat, something like a derisive smile on his face.

"Jump him! Down him!"

But for all these cries, the wretched gang held back from that cool man, leaning so quietly against the bar. There was something about his quiet and unconcerned aspect that made them hesitate about attacking him.

CHAPTER XV.

PUTTING UP AN ELEGANT BLUFF.

Not a word had The Hawk spoken, but, for all that, there was something in his aspect that caused the men to hesitate about springing at him.

Of all in Rut Murphy's dive, the unmasked detective was the coolest and least concerned. At least, it seemed that way.

It was an exhibition of nerve that should have won the admiration of the gang.

"Why don't you jump him?" shouted Bob Darcy. "Look out he don't sneak! He's slippery as grease!"

Hawk's eyes rested on the young thug, and he smiled still more broadly, as if really amused.

"Danged if he ain't laffin' at ye!" gurgled Rut Murphy, from the depths of his fat throat.

"That's what he is," chuckled Doc Smith, who appeared to be enjoying the excitement hugely. "He don't even seem worried. I swear! he's a daisy!"

Doc had no fear of the police, for, low though he had sunk, he had not yet lifted his hand to crime.

"Curse him!" snarled Bob.

"That's right, me boy," spluttered Rut Murphy. "Curse him much as ye please. But why don't ye get in there and tackle him?"

"That's it!" cried one of the crowd. "Come over here and jump him first. We'll foller ye."

Hawk's eyes twinkled as if he really enjoyed the prospect of being "jumped." Surely he was not quaking in his shoes, dangerous though the situation seemed.

Still he remained silent.

That very silence, together with his fearless aspect, awed and held in check the mob.

But it could not last.

Aroused by the invitation of lead in the attack on the detective, Bob Darcy pushed his way to the front and faced the man who was leaning against the bar.

"We've got you this time!" he cried—"got ye cold!"

Then Hawk spoke.

"I take it you're something of a sport, Robert," he said, his voice smooth and placid. "If you are, I'll give you a chance to make a winning."

"What d'ye mean?"

"Well, it's like this: You think you've got me, and I think you haven't. I'm even willing to give you odds on it, and I'll go you two to one. We'll put the money up in a gentleman's hands—say those of Mr. Rut Murphy."

For an instant the young thug was taken aback, and then he cried:

"You can't fool this crowd that way! We're onto you!"

Then a hoarse shout went up from the gang, and they took their clinched hands above their heads. They seemed like a pack of wolves snarling over a bone.

Hawk did not take his eyes off Bob Darcy or his hand from his pocket.

But Murphy seemed doubtful and not a little alarmed. He had never known such a riot in his place, and he began to fear it would bring down the police upon the dive.

"Don't think I'm fooling, dear Robert," purred the detective, his voice like oil. "I am not given to folly. I mean exactly what I say. You think you have me, but it is simply a case of think so—nothing more."

"It's a case of know so. How are you going to escape? You are fairly cornered, me fly spotter!"

"Cornered, I admit; but that doesn't make any great difference. I have a way of taking care of myself. If you are thirsting to jump me, why don't you do it?"

Bob hesitated.

"Take your hand out of your pocket, cul," he said.

"What for?"

"Want to see what ye'r hold of."

"Is that all?"

"Yes. I reckon I know."

"What is it?"

"A revolver. But what'll one revolver 'mount to in this crowd. You won't have time to use it more'n once, and then we'd have ye down an' be kickin' the breath out of ye."

"I'm not putting my dependence on one revolver, Robert; and you'll have to guess again if you name what I have in my hand."

"Not a pistol?"

"No."

"What, then?"

"This."

Hawk took his hand from his pocket and held up something that was lightly grasped in his forefinger and thumb.

It was simply a small nickel-plated whistle.

The crowd stared at it in surprise.

"Well, w'ot in der name of John L. is dat?" cried one.

"This is a little instrument that produces the most delightful music imaginable," smiled the cool detective. "If I should place it to my lips and blow a certain high note, I'd have about twenty gentlemen here before you could wink your eye. And those twenty gentlemen would be dressed in beautiful blue garments and carry in their right hands those lovely implements known as night sticks."

"De cops!"

"Police!"

"Dey're layin' outside!"

"Holy smoke! Let me out!"

For an instant, Bob the Thug turned a shade pale, but he quickly recovered.

"Rats!" he shouted. "It's all a dirty bluff! There ain't no police!"

But the crowd was not so sure of that.

"How do you know?" questioned a voice.

"This fly can't fool me," asserted Bob.

"He's cornered, an' that's why he's stringing us."

"Do you really think so?" blandly inquired Hawk, his eyes on Rut Murphy, who was plainly startled by the idea that there might possibly be a gang of blue-coats ready to raid his dive. "I wonder how Mr. Murphy looks on the matter? He is a gentleman of good sense, and it is left to him to say if I shall call in my friends on the outside."

"Good thunder!" gurgled Murphy, beneath his breath. "It would ruin me!"

In truth, the detective was playing a stiff game of bluff, for he did not know there was a policeman within sound of his whistle; but, realizing how desperate his position really was, his quick wit had devised a scheme to deceive the tramps and the vagrants and frighten the crooks. He had played his hand boldly and skillfully, and it began to seem that he would cow the gang.

For all their pretended contempt for the police, the keepers of dives where the vicious and criminal element of the city resort are always in terror of a raid. The famous "Slide" and the "Hole-in-the-Wall" had both been closed by the police, and the proprietors of these places, for all of their boasts of "a pull," had been fitly punished. Murphy had a pull, but he had several times been warned that he must look out for Hawk McKnight.

"Look here!" he suddenly exclaimed.

"I'm a law-respecting citizen, and I run a respectable family resort. I don't want to do anything to offend the police, and I don't propose to have any row in me saloon."

Hawk did not show the least sign of triumph, although he must have felt a thrill of satisfaction. He still remained calmly leaning against the bar, to which he had now turned his back.

"Oh, come!" cried Bob Darcy, in dismay.

"Ye ain't going to let this man come in here and get out with a whole skin, are ye, Mr. Murphy?"

"Any gentlemen," said Rut, deliberately

and impressively—"any gentleman can come into me place and walk out without bein' harmed a hair."

As if gentlemen were in the habit of frequenting that den!

"But I am not going out alone," said Hawk, suddenly straightening up and looking resolute. "I came here for a man, and I am going to have that man if I have to call in the officers to raid this dive."

"Just pick out yer man, Mr. Hawk," invited the dive-keeper. "I'll see that ye take him away. I want no suspicious characters about me saloon."

The detective realized that, fearful of a raid, Murphy would really assist him in taking the man he wanted.

The next thing was, could he get away with the fellow? The mob must soon discover he had deceived them, and then they would be furious to get at him. How was he to obtain start enough to keep beyond their reach?

No matter; he would make the attempt. Pointing his finger straight at Bob Darcy, he grimly said:

"There's my man!"

"Any other?" blandly inquired Mr. Murphy.

"This is all the one I want. The others will not be troubled so long as they do not interfere with me."

"Then take him," said the dive-keeper. "He's yours, an' I'll crack the head of the first man that tries to bother ye."

"You don't mean it?" exclaimed Bob, desperately. "You can't mean you intend to let this fellow pinch me?" He tried to edge toward the door, but Rut Murphy blocked the way.

"I mean that same. Take your man, Mr. Officer."

With a sudden yell of fury, the young thug wheeled and slashed his way through the crowd, ran to a bench, on which he leaped, and then launched himself into the center of a heavy window curtain, disappearing through the window, with a great crash and jingle of breaking glass!

CHAPTER XVI.

HAWK EXPOSES HIS HAND.

CRASH—jingle—thud!

The heavy curtain had protected Bob Darcy from being injured by the broken glass of the window, and he landed with a thud upon the ground outside.

"Good-night!" he called back, derisively.

His voice was not heard above the uproar that had again broken out in the saloon.

The desperate young crook had escaped, and in the excitement that followed, Hawk disappeared.

Then it was discovered there were no policemen in the alley, and Rut Murphy breathed easier, although he swore about the detective beneath his breath.

That night The Hawk lost trace of Bob once more, and during the next two days he was not able to get track of the desperate young crook or the missing Mrs. Claxton.

He anxiously awaited Enos Gregory's recovery, but, although the old broker's injuries were not dangerous, they certainly were serious.

The shock had affected the man's head, and he did not seem able to remember anything about his past life more than now and then a fleeting something that was vague and indistinct.

The physicians said the trouble might be temporary or it might result in a permanent loss of memory.

The disappearance of Judah Ryswick from the hospital was still a mystery, and Abel Keene was hard at work upon it, although he was, in fact, making very little progress.

It began to seem that Ryswick had played a very shrewd game, for it was not probable he had remained unconscious so long and taken to flight so soon after recovering. It was probable he had recovered and heard the talk of the surgeons and attendants, and then had pretended to still be in a comatose condition. At a favorable moment, he had arisen and made his escape.

But it still remained a mystery how he had made his way out of the hospital without being seen by any one.

Hawk had a theory that he had resorted to wholesale bribery, but the Dapper Detective did not air his views.

On the third day, a body was found floating in the East River—the body of a fairly well-dressed man.

At the Morgue it was said the body was that of the missing Judah Ryswick.

Hawk McKnight lost no time in hurrying to the Morgue to investigate for himself.

He came face to face with Abel Keene, who was just leaving the dead-house.

"Hello, Keene," he called. "How did you find it?"

"Find what?" asked the portly detective, a trifle startled.

"The stiff. I suppose you have been to look at the body said to be Ryswick's?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"It's Ryswick, fast enough."

"Sure?"

"Of course I am! What do you take me for? I never make a mistake!"

Hawk was tempted to call the pompous detective down, but he refrained. Instead, he asked:

"What do you make of it?"

"Suicide."

"But why should Judah Ryswick commit suicide?"

"I think he was daft."

"From the bullet-wound?"

"Certainly."

"And do you think a crazy man succeeded in slipping out of Bellevue?"

"It looks like it."

"Impossible!"

"You may think so, but how did he get out otherwise?"

"I do not care to express my opinion at present on that point. If this corpse is Ryswick, he did not succeed in getting far."

"He got as far as the river. His death closed the case, I reckon."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. It's a queer affair anyway, and I don't think there is much in it, after all. If the object was blackmail, it failed, and the principal rascal is dead. Enos Gregory did not tell the truth about it in the first place, and now he is in no condition to tell anything. What's the use of wasting time?"

"Somebody is responsible for Judah Ryswick's death."

"Well?"

"Well, there is a mystery you have not yet solved."

"Is it important?"

"You seem to put small value on a human life. It may be important."

"Well, I do not worry about finding the person who shot Ryswick whenever I desire to find him."

"You mean Gregory?"

"What if I do?"

A smile flitted across the face of the Dapper Detective.

"I know your reputation, Keene, and I do not want to say anything that will offend."

The face of the portly detective flushed, but his interest was aroused, and he asked:

"What do you mean?"

"If I told you, you might take offense."

"Hardly that. I should take it from whence it came."

"Which I am certain is not intended as a compliment for me. Never mind. There is more in this case than you seem to think. I mean to see it through to the end, and I want to pit my skill against yours for the sake of convincing you, if nothing more, that I am fully your match."

"Your ambition is very laudable," observed Keene, in his most condescending manner; "but I doubt if your methods would prove successful on this kind of a case. I have heard you are skillful at disguises and all that, but that business is not required in this sort of a case. Here you would have to work on an entirely different plan, and you would handle people of a sort you are not accustomed to deal with."

"Well, I could no more than fail. As it is, I have picked up a few points you overlooked. You still think Enos Gregory fired the shot that keeled Judah Ryswick over, but you are mistaken!"

The portly detective flushed again, and he

appeared ready to burst forth angrily; but he restrained himself, speaking with an ill-concealed sneer:

"You astonish me! Your acuteness is something remarkable! If Gregory did not shoot Ryswick, then the woman must, and that is clearly impossible. You have made a slash at empty air."

"You are welcome to think so, but if you give up this case as not worthy of your attention and I happen to unearth a magnificent and startling piece of rascality, you will feel rather chagrined."

"You are speaking of the improbable."

"But not the impossible. I have something more to tell you: Mrs. Claxton, or whatever her name is, did not shoot Judah Ryswick."

"If neither she or Gregory did the shooting, who in blazes did?"

"That is the mystery to be solved."

"Huah!"

"I confess frankly I have not solved it yet; but there is another party in this case just as true as you are a breathing man. That unknown party is the one who did the shooting!"

Despite himself, Abel Keene was impressed, but he tried to keep from showing it to the Dapper Detective. He forced a sneer to his face and deliberately re-lighted a half smoked cigar he had been holding in his fingers.

"It would be interesting to know how you figured this all out," he said. "Pray where was this unknown assassin when he did the shooting? We did not discover him in the office, although we heard the report of the revolver."

"We did not discover him in the office because he was not in the office at all."

Keene started.

"Not in the office?"

"That's what I said."

"Then where was he?"

"On the fire-escape at the window found open slightly at the top!"

This was a new idea for Abel Keene, and he scowled over it, grunting deep in his throat.

Hawk watched him intently. The Dapper Detective had taken a fancy to give Keene the benefit of his discoveries, it being his desire to vanquish the man in an open battle. He was not working on the case for reward, but for reputation, and it would be a feather in his cap if he outwitted the astute Abel Keene. He did not want Keene to drop the case, as his victory would then seem far less pronounced, therefore he was giving the man the benefit of what he believed to be the truth concerning the shooting.

"Will you be good enough to explain how you arrived at this remarkable conclusion?" grunted the regular. "Of course you have something on which to base your theory?"

"Certainly."

"What is it?"

"Well, there were two revolvers found at the foot of the fire-escape."

"That proves nothing."

"Only one window was broken, where one revolver was cast through it."

"The second revolver might have been thrown fairly through the pane of glass."

"There was a ladder against the foot of the fire-escape."

"What of that?"

"It was used by the person who did the shooting—used to reach the fire-escape and window of Enos Gregory's office."

"How do you know?"

"I discovered this person's fresh tracks on the ground beneath the window."

"Ah!" gurgled Abel Keene. "Now you are beginning to interest me! Go on, go on!"

CHAPTER XVII.

CLUES.

It was Hawk's turn to smile.

"I fancied I could interest you in time," he quietly observed.

The portly detective quickly cut in:

"I don't say I take any stock in this theory of yours, but it is possible there is something in it."

"Thank you."

"What else did you find beneath the window?"

"Are you not already convinced? What if I found nothing more?"

"I should say you had a decidedly slender foundation for your theory, sir."

"Well, you may say what you please, Mr. Keene. I have given you my idea of how the shooting occurred. You are welcome to make of it whatever you can."

A sudden suspicion assailed the police officer.

"It is singular you should put yourself out to set me on the right track, if you consider this the right track. You are a very clever man, McKnight, but I do not think I will waste time trying to find a man who shot Judah Ryswick from the fire-escape."

"As you please," retorted Hawk, quietly. "You think I am trying to put you on a false scent. Well, you are welcome to think so."

He seemed about to turn away and enter the Morgue, but, of a sudden, he went on:

"Do you want to know what else I found beneath the window? Well, I'll tell you. There was a nail protruding from that ladder, and the first time I descended I discovered a bit of cloth on that nail."

Abel Keene's eyes glistened, but he repressed his eagerness.

"That may mean nothing."

"It may mean *everything*."

"Well," came deliberately from the portly detective's lips, "that is true. Did you secure the bit of cloth?"

"Certainly."

"Would you mind letting me see it?"

Hawk took a leather case from his pocket and extracted a tiny bit of cloth therefrom. This Keene scrutinized closely, scowling and gurgling in his throat.

"This might have come from the clothes of some common laborer," he observed. "It certainly was not torn from a garment worn by a gentleman."

"That is evident."

"It is possible, in case there is anything in your theory, that some crank climbed to that window and shot the man."

"But what could any crank want to shoot Ryswick for? He was not wealthy."

"Possibly the assassin intended the bullet for Enos Gregory."

"Possibly. But you will remember Gregory's strange actions when we first came upon him in the office with Ryswick stretched at his feet on the floor. At first, the broker declared he had shot the man in self-defense."

"I remember it very well."

"Then, finding that involved him alarmingly, he changed his tone and swore Ryswick had shot himself."

"He did."

"And now, if it proves he did not shoot the man and Ryswick did not shoot himself, what are we to think of his statement?"

"That's it—that's just it!" grunted Keene, his eyes glistening. "If the man was shot by some one outside the window, why under heaven should Gregory act in such a remarkable manner? Why didn't he promptly declare the truth?"

"That is a part of the mystery. Nothing in this case! My dear Keene, this seems to me like a complicated affair worthy of your best efforts."

The portly officer hemmed and hawed, finally saying:

"Well, you see, I have handled so many of this nature that it does not arouse so much enthusiasm in me as it does in you." And then, all at once, he added:

"What say if we go into this thing together? It really requires two men, but it doesn't seem important enough to warrant a demand for another at Headquarters."

Hawk laughed softly in the face of the author of this proposal.

"You are shrewd, Mr. Abel Keene, but you do not catch me in that kind of a trap. If we went into this matter together and worked it out to a successful finish, where would I be? You would have all the glory, and, if you took a fancy, I would be blanketed entirely. You might condescend to say you had been aided by a private detective named Hawkins McKnight."

"Well, well, well! What more do you want?"

"What more? Everything. I tell you I want the reputation of having beaten you on your own case, and I mean to have it."

Abel Keene was considerably taken aback,

for he had fancied this common private detective would be delighted to go into partnership with him, and he had made the offer in a most condescending manner. The refusal astonished him, but he recovered as quickly as possible.

"It is not every day I make such an offer," he said, stiffly. "If you get ahead of me, you are welcome." He passed the bit of cloth back to Hawk.

The independent detective saw he had touched the man sharply, and that was exactly what he meant to do. As he restored the bit of cloth to the leather case, he extracted something else, which he handed to Keene, observing:

"This may also prove of interest to you."

It was a woman's hair, carefully coiled.

"What's this?" asked Keene, languidly.

"Another of your remarkable clues?"

"I consider it a clue."

"Hum! Where did it come from?"

"I found it caught on the trigger-guard of the revolver with which John Ryswick was shot!"

The police ferret could not repress a start. Here in his fingers was indeed a clue. He realized the value of Hawk's discovery, and, at the same instant, he began to appreciate the fact that the man who had thus boldly declared himself his rival was keen as a fox and like a hound on the scent. From that moment he feared Hawkins McKnight.

"This is a woman's hair," he slowly observed. "Coal black. You do not imagine a woman climbed up that ladder and shot Judah Ryswick?"

"That is a part of the mystery—that is something I have not yet discovered."

"But this does not tally with the bit of cloth found on the nail. That was from the clothing of a man."

"Which adds to the mystery and increases my interest."

"But this revolver may have belonged to the woman known as Mrs. Claxton. This hair may have come from her head."

Hawk smiled a bit.

"That hair is black as midnight."

"Well?"

"Mrs. Claxton's hair was bleached to the very roots."

"You are right; I remember. This hair did not come from her head. Is it possible there is another woman connected with this affair? It looks that way. But why should a woman climb to that window and shoot Ryswick?"

"You investigated Ryswick's record?"

"Yes."

"And found him—just what?"

"A man about town, a rounder, a sport."

"And a lady-killer. If it was a woman who shot him, is it not possible the deed was done by some woman he had wronged?"

"It may have been. Perhaps she was jealous of the type-writer in Gregory's office."

"Now you are getting at the idea."

"But it is all supposition. I do not put much faith in it. If Ryswick was shot from the fire-escape, it is not at all likely the job was done by a woman. A woman would have faced him on the street, but I do not believe she would have climbed up the ladder and the fire-escape to the window."

"I do not say it was a woman, but—"

"I understand. The hair and the bit of cloth do not tally. Possibly the revolver belonged to the sister or wife of the man who lost the bit of cloth on the nail. That would explain the presence of the hair."

The hair was passed back to Hawk, who carefully deposited it in the leather case.

"Now," said the Dapper Detective, "as I have freely given you these points, would you mind telling me what you learned about Mr. Otis Day, of Chicago, the man who professed to be Mrs. Claxton's father?"

"There is nothing to tell beyond the fact that he gave a fictitious name and hails from Philadelphia, instead of Chicago. He is a coal dealer in Philadelphia, and is pretty well fixed, being a widower with no children. He met this woman on the train and placed her in that furnished flat. I do not think he has any further connection with the case."

Hawk watched the police detective closely as he said those words, and he could see the man was speaking the truth. The

case of Otis Day was disposed of, then, and they need bother themselves no more about the man.

Of a sudden, Abel Keene took out his watch and glanced at it, after which he said:

"Well, McKnight, I'll have to go on. I am much obliged to you for your tips, even they do not amount to much. Good-day."

The words were prompted by a feeling of chagrin and jealousy, and the man regretted them the moment they were spoken. But Hawk scarcely seemed to notice them at all, and he smiled pleasantly as he said good-day and turned into the Morgue.

There was a scowl on Abel Keene's face as he hurried away, and he muttered:

"That fellow is keen as a brier. If I do not look sharp, he will really beat me on this case."

But little did he dream of the discovery Hawk made in the Morgue.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"FOR THE LAST TIME."

MEDA GREGORY watched over and cared for her father in a manner that showed how dearly and tenderly she loved him.

She was a charming girl, with hazel eyes and dark-brown hair that had a reddish tint in the sunshine. She was sensible, as well as pretty, and, naturally, she had a great many admirers: but Gerald Valdimer was the favored one among them all, their engagement having been announced.

Valdimer's father had made his money in the Cotton Exchange and retired from speculation. At one time, it was said Gerald had "hit a lively pace," and was blowing cash freely, but he made an abrupt change in his mode of living, taking to the legitimate handling of real estate, at which he was very shrewd, and in which there is always money for those who have capital behind them and brains to invest it properly.

Mrs. Gregory was a cool, reserved woman, much given to afternoon teas and receptions. She took very little interest in her own family or the affairs of her husband, and therefore it was not strange the broker did not make a confidante of her, choosing Meda instead.

The girl was peculiar in these days of feminine frivolity and extravagance, being modest and retiring, caring less for society and display than for her home, her pets and her books.

She was greatly distressed and worried about her father, although the old broker did not remain in bed two days after he was injured. Despite the fact that he got up so quickly, his mind seemed affected by the shock, and she feared he would never be his old self again. Sometimes he would look at her in a queer manner and ask:

"Who are you, young lady?"

"Why, father!" she would reply: "I am your own Meda—your little girl."

At this, he would shake his head, declaring:

"No, no; my little girl is dead. There is some mistake here—some mistake."

It irritated him when she persisted in asserting she was his own child, as she discovered, and she finally humored him in his odd fancies.

Still he could not bear to have her from him a great while during his waking moments. He was content if she were in the room where he could sit and watch her, but she often saw him shake his head in a troubled manner, as he muttered:

"There is a mistake—a big mistake. This can't be my daughter."

But she well knew these strange fancies were the result of the shock and the blow on the head received as he was dashed to the pavement.

One day a veiled woman rung the bell and asked to see Meda. She was shown into the reception-room and asked for her card.

Instead of producing the card, she handed the servant a sealed note, requesting it to be taken to the young lady.

The girl soon appeared, and her face was very pale, as she asked:

"Who are you and what is your business with me?"

The woman did not lift her veil, as she retorted with a question:

"Are you certain we will not be troubled or overheard?"

"Quite certain."

"My business is most important, and it concerns you deeply, Miss Gregory. It is for your own good I ask you to make sure no person overhears what I have to say."

The strange woman was with Meda for nearly an hour, and Mrs. Gregory grew somewhat nervous. She was about to descend when they came out into the lower hall.

The woman at the head of the stairs heard the veiled stranger say:

"At three to-morrow, then?"

"Yes, at three." There was a quiver in Meda's voice.

"I shall keep my word if you refuse to see me."

"I shall not refuse. Good-day, madam."

"Good-day." And the strange woman was let out at the door.

Mrs. Gregory came languidly and noiselessly down the stairs, her eyes on Meda, who was standing like a statue in the dimly-lighted hall, her face covered by her hands.

"Meda."

The girl stared and uttered a little cry of terror, catching at the banister.

"M-m-mother!" She stumbled over the word, seeming quite unnerved.

"You seem frightened, child; you are all atremble."

"You startled me."

"Who was that woman?"

Meda hesitated and stammered, and then, all at once, she cried:

"Do not ask me—do not ask me! I cannot tell you now!" With that, she fled up the stairs like a frightened deer and was gone.

Mrs. Gregory was thunderstruck, but she carefully repressed any show of emotion, although she was now quite alone in the hall. She did not speak until she was quite certain her voice would be steady, and then she murmured:

"Very singular, indeed. I will have to look into this. My daughter receiving calls from strange veiled women and then declining to tell who they are! It is certainly singular and improper. She has given me a severe shock by her remarkable conduct. I am quite disturbed."

Then she retired to her room, rung up her maid, had her temples wet with *Eau de Cologne* and was fanned to sleep. She was really quite prostrated.

In her own room the sweet-faced Meda was pacing up and down like a caged tigress, her shapely head thrown back, her face pale, her eyes blazing and her hands clinched until the delicately polished nails cut into her palms.

For a long time, no word or sound came from her pressed-together lips, but she was plainly suffering tortures. At length, she wrung her hands and moaned:

"It is cruel—cruel! Why should fate be so hard with us just now? What have we done to merit it? My poor, poor father! What can I do?"

She finally flung herself down on the bed and lay there, silent sobs shaking her graceful form. She did not sob herself to sleep, for her agony was too great for such relief.

After a time, she arose and dried her eyes. There was a look of resolution on her face that showed she had arrived at some determination.

"They shall not bring ruin and disgrace on this house!" came from her lips. "There is but one way to prevent it. Everything depends on me. I can baffle this cruel woman, and I will do it!"

Catching a glimpse of herself in a large mirror, she was startled. Her face was actually haggard, and there was a hardness about it she had never seen there before.

"Ah! you have changed in the last two hours!" she cried. "You are no longer a girl! You are a woman—and nameless—homeless!"

Then she actually smiled at her reflection, but it was a hard defiant smile—a mockery.

"What a sensation it will create!" she murmured, as, with a silver key, she unlocked her jewel case. "There will be a terrible flurry, but it cannot be avoided! There is no hesitating now!"

When the ivory case was opened, the gems lay before her dazzling in their splendor.

"I never cared so much for you as other girls care for such things!" she cried; "but now you will be of value to me, for you are all mine, and I can turn you into money. Money would buy silence, but not one cent goes to those people! I have no right here! Let them find me to-morrow!"

After running over the jewels and making a mental estimate of their value, she locked the case once more and sat down at a tiny carved desk to write. But she had not touched pen to paper when there was a knock at the door, and the maid stated Gerald Valdimier waited her below.

"I can't see him!" she cried, so wildly that the maid was astounded. "No, no—not to-day!"

But when the girl would have departed with the message, she stopped her.

"Wait! Let me think!"

After pacing the floor a few moments, she said:

"Tell him I will be down very soon."

After the girl was gone, Meda bathed her face and carefully banished all traces of tears. As she looked at her reflection in the glass, she murmured:

"It is for the last time! But he must not know—he must not know!"

CHAPTER XIX.

"FAREWELL!"

GERALD hastened to meet her, his hands outstretched.

"Meda, darling, you—"

He paused, astonished, for something in her appearance cut him short. At that moment tears were very near her eyes, and she nearly betrayed herself; but, with determination and bravery, she forced a smile, a trifle wan, it is true, but still a smile.

"Gerald!"

He caught her in his arms and kissed her tenderly.

"How strange you appear!" he said, gazing into her eyes, which fell before his searching glance. "What has happened?"

"Nothing—nothing!"

But he saw she was not sincere.

"Ah! I cannot believe that, sweetheart. Something has caused you trouble—something has given you pain. Is it anything new about your father?"

"Ah, Gerald! Is there anything new to give me pain? My poor father—"

He held her close and kissed her forehead.

"You must not worry about him, dear; I am sure he will come 'round all right in time."

"Oh, I am not so sure!"

"The doctor says it is not liable to result seriously, although some time may be required to restore him to his usual health."

She saw she had led him from the point of danger, and she breathed freely once more.

"My poor father! Even the doctors are not so sure he will recover. Gerald, tell me what it is about a man being shot in his office. You know they would not let me see the papers, and you promised you would tell."

He led her to a double divan and pulled her down at his side. The softened light sifted through the delicate draperies and made her look more ravishing than ever. With the warm impulse of a passionate lover in whose veins leaped the fresh blood of youth, he kissed her again and again on the lips, the cheeks, the eyes, the hair. She put her shapely white hands on his shoulders and held him firmly away, saying reprovingly:

"Stop, Gerald! You must not! Mother would be shocked at your unconventionality."

"I haven't a doubt of it," he laughed. "Frankly, Meda, your mother is easily shocked. She would have me give you a frigid kiss on the fingers or the forehead and think that just the proper kind of love-making. I despise conventionality, dear girl, and I believe we would be happier if we lived nearer to nature's heart and allowed ourselves to be moved by our true impulses, instead of putting a guard on our every act lest we do something somebody might consider improper if they knew of it. I know I wear creased trousers and a stiff standing collar, but I do so because everybody else does, and not because I consider it nice or agreeable. I tell you, we are a little too much civilized here in the East; we would

be better and manlier if we had more of the dash-and-go of the new West—more of the carelessness of public opinion. I am—"

She put her soft hand over his mouth, and he kissed it.

"You are preaching a regular sermon!" she exclaimed, for an instant forgetting what that day had brought upon her. "I do not like preaching—especially from you."

"Then I am done, dearest."

"You did not answer my question."

"I have forgotten what it was."

"That's nice of you! I asked you about this man who was shot in father's office. How did it happen?"

"That is still a mystery," he slowly replied. "It is thought he committed suicide there—or tried to, for he did not quite kill himself."

"Then he is not dead?"

"Yes. He escaped from the hospital and was drowned in East River."

"Too bad!"

"Yes; for he might have solved the mystery of the shooting had he lived."

"And father is in no condition to tell how it happened."

"Far from it."

He held her hands and looked into her face. Now that it was in repose once more, he fancied he discerned a vague uncertain shadow upon it, and a fear that all was not well with her smote to his heart.

"Meda," he half-whispered, "there is something troubling you, sweetheart; I can see it far down in your eyes—your beautiful eyes. Tell me what it is—trust me."

She drew away, as if frightened, seeming to fear he could read the whole horrible truth in her face. She grew crimson, and then, suddenly bursting into tears, slipped down to the floor and lay at his feet.

He could not have been more astounded had the house fallen. In an instant he was on his knees at her side, his hands touching her hair, her cheek, while he cried:

"Meda, Meda! What is it, sweetheart? This is terrible! Have I done anything to wound your dear little heart? Tell me the truth, darling! Do not cry like this! It hurts me!"

He lifted her in his arms and would have kissed her again, but, with a fierce outlay of strength, she broke from him, fairly panting:

"No, no, no! You must not! Oh, if you only knew the truth—the whole cruel truth! You would never kiss me then! You would hate me!"

"Are you crazy, sweetheart mine? Hate you! Such a thing is impossible! What foolish notion has crept into this dear little head? Let me get those hands fast in my own and—"

With a movement that was graceful as the leap of a fawn, she sprung to her feet and stood looking down at him as he half-sat upon the great Persian rug spread before the divan.

"I say you would hate me!" she cried, her eyes blazing now, her mood having changed quite. "If not, then you would loathe me, and that is a thousand times worse! And I am not to blame—Heaven knows I am not to blame! It was no fault of mine! Oh, why should God be so cruel!"

The man was more than ever astounded. He gazed at her, speechless for the time, and saw her wring her hands and press them to her throbbing temples.

"Great Heaven!" he gasped. "Her father's misfortune has driven her mad!"

His words brought her to her senses in a measure, and, with a mighty effort, she calmed herself to say:

"No, Gerald, I am not mad, but I should not go on like this. What is to be will be. You have said that to me a hundred times, and now I believe it. It was fate, and it is useless for me to rebel."

He arose, looking at her queerly.

"Do you know what you are saying, Meda?" was his question. "What is the sense of all this? I never saw you in such moods before."

"And you will never see me in such moods again. This is the last time."

He did not understand the full meaning of her words. Had he understood them, much of the suffering and heart-acting that followed might have been averted.

"You are worn out with worry about your father, sweetheart," he said, soothingly. "Come and sit down again. Try to calm yourself, my poor little girl."

Her lips trembled.

"How good you are, Gerald!" she softly breathed. "But you must let me walk a bit. I shall grow calm much sooner in that manner."

So she walked about the room, while he watched her wonderingly. She talked in a rambling manner of many topics, apparently trying to forget something that was preying on her mind. At length, she came and stood near him.

"It was foolish of me to make such a scene," came firmly from her lips; "but it was not a quarrel, was it, Gerald? We have never quarreled but once, and I was so wretched then. I thought I hated you and never wanted to see you more; but I was mistaken. I loved you all the time—"

"My darling!"

He would have caught her in his arms, but she would not have it then. However, he secured both her hands and held them fast, observing they were cold and trembled a little in his grasp.

"Next to my father, I love you more than all else in the world," she went on, her eyes lifted to his, a strange light in their depths. "Oh, you will not think me bold because I say this?"

Astounded though he was, he cried:

"Never! I have tried to get you to say so before, but you were ever so strange and shy. What has wrought this marvelous change in you, dearest?"

She did not seem to like the question.

"Don't ask me that!—don't ask me anything to-night! I cannot explain! Ah! Gerald, you will think kindly of me always—always?"

"Always, sweetheart!"

"No matter what you may hear?"

"I can only hear good of you."

"Ah! you do not know—you cannot tell! Perhaps the whole world will know!"

He lowered his brows.

"Know what? Come, Meda, do tell me what it is you are going on so about! I am all broken up—on my word, I am! I cannot understand you to-day."

She turned her head away and he saw her lips were quivering. Before she could offer resistance, he had caught her to him once more and was kissing her tenderly.

For a moment, she did not resist. She lay quietly in his arms, making no move; and then, just as he fancied she was on the point of breaking away, she encircled his neck with her arms and returned his kisses almost fiercely.

This lasted but an instant, and then she had slipped from him and was standing on the opposite side of the center-table, shaking from head to feet like a reed in a strong gale, her face literally flaming. Never before had she thus abandoned herself to impulse, and he felt as if her kisses had stung him. The glorious eyes turned upon him were full of an unspeakable and hopeless yearning.

For some moments, not a word was spoken by either of them, and only their quickened breathing and the heavy beating of their hearts was to be heard. He saw the color gradually die from her neck, her temples, her cheeks, and then her whole face became pale as that of a corpse. She swayed a trifle, and, thinking she would fall, he started toward her.

"No!" she said, hoarsely, warning him off with one hand. "I am all right—I am strong. I know you will not misunderstand me when you hear the truth, even if you do now. You will not think evil of me—"

"Meda!"

She saw she had really struck him to the quick.

"Forgive me!" she entreated, huskily. "I am not myself to-day. But what must you think of a girl who will do such a thing? Wait! Do not think of it at all! Wait until to-morrow!"

"What of to-morrow?"

"You shall know. You will not think wrong of me then."

"You are to be my wife, Meda. I shall never think wrong of you."

"Your wife?"

"Yes. Again I urge you to set the day. The wedding shall be announced."

Someway he secured one of her hands, but she kept the other from him, and a barrier seemed to have arisen between them. There was something in that room that chilled him and filled his heart with fear that he could not define.

"Your wife," she repeated, slowly. "You deserve a good woman for a wife, Gerald."

"And a good woman I will have—the best and noblest little woman in all the wide world! Name the day, Meda!"

"No, Gerald; can't you see I am in no condition to name the day? And with father so ill—it would be wrong. I am quite exhausted. You must go now, dear Gerald. No, no! I beg you not to kiss me again! Well, if you must, let it be for the last time."

How strangely those words smote upon his heart! "For the last time!" And yet he did not grasp their full meaning then.

A few moments later, she saw him to the door. Their fingers clung together, as he whispered:

"Good-by, sweetheart!"

She answered, with a sob deep in her throat:

"Farewell!"

The word pursued him as he descended the steps and passed down the avenue. It still seemed to sound in his ears and echo in his heart. He heard it in the sound of his own footsteps and the rumble of carriages.

"Farewell! Farewell!"

CHAPTER XX.

MEDA VANISHES.

THE following day fashionable New York was treated to a sensation.

Meda Gregory, daughter of the injured broker, had mysteriously disappeared!

It is impossible to say how this fact became known to the general public so swiftly, for it was the policy of Mrs. Gregory to keep the matter strictly private; but it leaked out in some way, and the two o'clock edition of the enterprising "evening papers" gave the story to the multitudes.

The Evening Earth, the most sensational paper published in the Metropolis, came out with "scare headlines" that could not fail to catch the eyes of its readers. Its account of the "Mysterious Disappearance" was verbose, nearly a column and a half being taken up by it. Other papers gave all the facts in much less space, but all united in saying the vanishing of the young lady had created a great sensation in the most fashionable society.

There was a great deal of speculation as to the cause of the girl's strange act, but the popular belief was that her mind had been unbalanced by the disaster that had befallen her father, whom she loved so dearly. It was thought the letter left to her mother proved this.

The letter ran as follows:

"MY DEAR MOTHER:—

"I call you that, for you have in many ways been a mother to me. When you read this I shall be far away, and you will never see me again. I am driven from my home—my dear, dear home! I cannot explain it—I cannot! I go to avert the disgrace that must fall on you and my poor father if I remained. I cannot despise him, even though I know all the terrible truth. I would that I could remain at his side and care for him until he is quite recovered. I would then be content to go far distant and never return; but it is hard—so hard!—to creep away like a thief.

"I implore you to make no efforts to follow me and bring me back! I cannot return here without bringing disgrace on us all, for bribery and hush-money will not keep the dark secret forever buried. I knew it would surely come out if I remained, and that is why I am going away. Do not worry about me, for I have some money, and I will take the jewels that rightfully belong to me. I can dispose of them for enough to take care of me for a long time to come, and then I can discover some way to earn a living. I shall try to be brave—I shall work!

"When I kissed father good-night it was also farewell. He will know why I have gone when he is himself again. Tell him I still love him, for all of the black truth.

My heart is breaking, but I must go! I shudder when I think of facing the great harsh world all alone, but it must be done. To-morrow I will be homeless!

"I leave a brief note for Gerald. Kindly see it is delivered to him.

"Farewell.

MEDA."

The letter was full of mysterious references to some "dark secret," but it was thought to be the imaginings of an overtaxed mind.

When Mrs. Gregory had read it to the last word she promptly and gracefully fainted, taking care to do so in a manner that could not be considered shocking or unconventional.

The note to Gerald Valdimer was much briefer, but it nearly tore the heart from the young man's breast.

"MY DARLING GERALD:—To-night I said 'Farewell,' and you will never see me again—never, never! I cannot explain, but you must believe I am forced to this desperate act. I had decided on it this afternoon, and now you will understand why I seemed so strange.

"Oh, my darling! my darling! it is killing me to leave you thus! All my happy dreams of the rosy future are over, and I see only a life of desolation and despair before me! I love you—you know how I love you! I can't write more; my tears blind me so I cannot see. Good-by, sweetheart, good-by! I shall pray for you always! Good-by!

"MEDA."

The writing was blotted and blurred by the tears that had fallen like rain upon the page.

For a time, Gerald was dazed, seeming unable to fully comprehend it all. When he had partially recovered, he was like a madman in his despair.

This was at an early hour, long before the papers appeared with their accounts of the singular affair, and Superintendent Byrnes was promptly notified. Abel Keene happened to be at hand, and the superintendent said:

"Keene, here seems to be a further development of the Gregory affair. I will guarantee this comes from the shooting in the broker's office. Go up there and investigate. Send or bring me an accurate description of the young lady, together with a photograph. We ought to be able to restore her to her home within twenty-four hours. Work lively, man."

When Keene reached the Gregory mansion he was surprised to find Hawk McKnight there before him.

"Great Scott!" gurgled the portly detective. "You seem to always be around!"

"It's a way I have," quietly replied Hawk.

"Well, what do you make of it?"

"It is a further development of this case you consider of no great consequence."

"Think so?"

"I do."

Keene set about learning the truth. First, he found out the girl had not slept in her bed the previous night, a fact that was discovered by the maid at ten o'clock in the morning.

"Did you go up to call Miss Gregory at ten?" questioned Abel.

"I called her first at nine," replied the maid.

"So early? For what reason?"

"Mr. Gregory had been asking for her."

"Um. Did you receive any answer to your first call?"

"Certainly not."

"How did you call her?"

"I rapped on the door."

"That all?"

"That was all the first time."

"When did you speak to her again?"

"At ten o'clock."

"This time you did more than rap on the door?"

"Yes, sir. I called her name."

"What then?"

"Not receiving any answer after calling several times, I tried the door."

"Did you open it?"

"Yes, sir."

"It was not locked?"

"No, sir."

"What did you find?"

"An empty room, sir. The bed had no

been slept in. I was frightened, and I immediately notified Mrs. Gregory. She could not believe me, and she sent me back to make sure. I knew I was not mistaken."

"Did you notice anything peculiar about the room, save that the bed had not been slept in?"

"Nothing but two letters on her little desk."

When Keene learned about the letters, he immediately called on for them both.

"McKnight," he said, turning to the private detective, "this case promises to be a corker!"

CHAPTER XXI.

GERALD IS QUESTIONED.

THE brief note from Meda to Gerald Valdimier was first placed in the hands of the police special. He read it through carefully, and then he called for the young man. It happened that Gerald was still in the house, and he was soon before the detective.

"You are the one to whom this note is addressed?" questioned Keene.

"Yes, sir."

"From it I infer the missing young lady is a sweetheart of yours?"

"She is my promised wife," replied Gerald, with dignity.

"This note is not dated, but I believe it was written last night?"

"It must have been, sir."

"She says: 'To-night I said "Farewell." What does she mean by that?"

"Exactly what she says. When I bade her good-day, she said farewell to me. I noticed it at the time, as it was a word I had never heard her use before."

"Um. She also says: 'Now you will understand why I seemed so strange.' And just above she speaks of some desperate act, probably that of her leaving home, saying she had decided on it this afternoon. Did you call here to see her yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"And did she act differently than usual?"

"She certainly did."

"In what way?"

"Well, she was nervous and excited, her moods changing in a moment from tears to laughter. She seemed all unstrung, and she talked very strangely. At times she would walk the floor in a perfect tempest of excitement, and I could not understand half what she meant by her singular words."

Abel Keene gurgled deep down in his throat and caressed his corpulent chin with his pudgy fingers, his eyes fastened on Gerald in a manner intended to be piercing. He knew Hawk was watching him and listening to every question, although the private detective really seemed utterly careless of what was going on. He had begun to fear this silent independent rogue-catcher who made so little fuss about what he was doing, asked few questions, and still seemed to know everything, having picked up clues that quite missed the regular officer's eyes.

"Did the young lady act as if her mind were troubled?"

"She certainly did."

"Did she say anything about never seeing you again?"

"No, not then."

"Then you were not aware she contemplates such a rash step?"

"By no means! Do you think I would have made no effort to prevent it had I suspected such a thing?"

"Very well! very well! Gently, gently! Do not get excited. I am an authorized officer sent here by Superintendent Byrnes, and it is necessary for me to probe to the very bottom of this affair. I shall ask only those questions I consider necessary, although they may seem trivial to you."

"Go on, sir," said Gerald, as calmly as he could under the circumstances. "If I can assist you in your work, I shall be only too eager to do so."

"That's the right spirit. Was the young woman cheerful?"

"I have told you her mood was changeable. She has never seemed quite like herself since her father was injured."

Keene caught at this.

"Did she speak of her father?"

"She did. Her mind has dwelt almost continually on his misfortune since he was injured."

"Just so, just so. What did she say about him?"

"She asked me about the shooting in his office. It seems she did not know the full particulars. Her mother had kept the papers from her."

"And you told her—what?"

"Not much. I told her a man had been shot there, but it was not known whether he committed suicide or not. I further told of his escape from the hospital and the discovery of his body in the river."

"Very indiscreet, young man," frowned the portly detective. "You should have used more judgment."

Gerald pressed his lips together, but made no reply to this, although his face flushed, showing he did not like it at all.

"It is possible you are in a measure responsible for the girl's mad act," the detective went on. "What did she say when you told her of this?"

"I do not exactly remember. She was so strange and changeable—her words were almost incoherent at times. She said something about my hating her if I knew the whole black truth."

Keene started a bit and glanced at Hawk; the private detective was gazing down at a pattern of the carpet, which he seemed to be busily following with the toe of his pointed shoe. It almost seemed that he did not hear anything that was passing, but the portly detective knew better than to think so.

"To what do you think she referred, Mr. Valdimier?"

"I could not imagine."

"Did she seem in her right mind?"

"Well, at one time I almost fancied her a bit off, but I was not certain."

"Do you remember any other unusual thing she said?"

"She asked me to ever think kindly of her, no matter what happened—no matter what I might hear about her."

"About her?"

"That is what she said."

Again that peculiar gurgling in Abel Keene's throat. He seemed to hesitate some seconds, and then he abruptly asked:

"You say she is your promised wife, Mr. Valdimier. Are you certain she loved you?"

Gerald crimsoned again, and it seemed for an instant that he would resent the question, but he held himself in check, answering quietly:

"I am sure of it."

"Have you a rival?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir."

"She had promised to marry you of her own free will?"

"Yes, sir."

"Um—well! Remember any other odd thing she said?"

The young man plainly hesitated, and Keene quickly urged him to tell everything, saying a word she had dropped might set him on the right track. The color had left Gerald's face, and his voice was a trifle unsteady, as he said:

"She asked me not to think evil of her, no matter what I heard."

Abel Keene whistled softly, but Hawk was still engrossed over the figures of the carpet.

"Had the wedding-day been set?"

"No, sir."

"Had you asked her to set it?"

"Yes, sir."

"When did you ask her?"

"I asked her yesterday."

"And she refused?"

"She declined."

"Yes, yes—declined, of course. What were her reasons, if she gave any?"

"The condition of her father."

"Um. Very good reasons. She could scarcely have been in a mood to think of her coming wedding. Her mind was fully taken up with her father's affliction."

"It has seemed to be."

"But yesterday—it was yesterday? That was the principal thing she talked of?"

"No."

"Indeed!"

"Yesterday it seemed something else that was troubling her—something I could not understand. I tried to understand her, but I could not."

"Just so. You have never seen her in such a mood before?"

"Never."

"And she bade you farewell when you left the house?"

"Yes, sir."

The portly detective cleared his throat and rubbed his hands together, as if satisfied.

"Why do you think she ran away?"

"I do not know—I cannot understand it. I have no theory. I have been stunned ever since receiving this note."

"Quite natural, quite natural. There is nothing more you can tell me that you think might lead to a result? Do not hesitate, I urge you."

But there was nothing else Gerald could tell, and Abel Keene was forced to be satisfied. When the young man had left the room, Keene turned to Hawk.

The independent detective was critically examining a rare painting on the wall.

"Well, McKnight, what do you think of it?"

The other turned.

"What do you think of it?"

"Well, it seems very simple to me."

"Is that so?"

"It is. Without doubt, this girl's mind has become unbalanced through the affliction that has befallen her father."

Hawk laughed a bit.

"Don't you think so?" quickly asked the portly special.

"No, sir, I do not," was the frank reply.

CHAPTER XXII.

WORSE THAN A CHINESE PUZZLE.

ABEL KEENE looked dumfounded, and then he fairly choked with sudden anger, the gurgle in his throat sounding like the smothered roar of an enraged bull. For some seconds he was unable to utter a word, and when he did speak, his voice was not steady by any means.

"Oh, you don't!" he sneered, attempting to crush the younger man with his scorn. "You don't think so! Well, I suppose you think you know it all! You have the gall to dispute with me! With me, sir—me, me!"

"I shall not dispute with you at all, Mr. Keene," came quietly from the lips of the private detective, as he once more turned his attention to the painting.

This seemed to stir the portly police special to still greater wrath.

"Oh, you won't dispute with me! Perhaps you think I am not worth arguing with? McKnight, you are an upstart!"

It really seemed that Hawk did not hear the words at all, for he shifted his position so the light would strike the painting differently, tipped his head to one side and whistled softly.

That quite knocked Abel Keene out, for he sunk into his chair, gasping and catching his breath, while he glared at the other man fiercely.

In a few seconds, he recovered himself and got upon his feet, speaking with attempted dignity:

"I suppose you are aware, McKnight, that I do not care a continental what you think! You hang around and listen to my questions, and then you have the impudence to tell me I do not know my business."

Still Hawk was engaged in admiring the picture.

"Do you hear?"

No reply.

"McKnight!"

"Sir?"

"Do you hear?"

"I beg your pardon. What were you saying?"

"None of your business!" grunted the police special, as he savagely rung for the servant. When the girl appeared, he said:

"Inform Mrs. Gregory I must see her immediately."

The girl disappeared, and Abel Keene walked up and down the room, fairly shaking the floor with his ponderous tread. In about three minutes he once more turned to Hawk, and that instant the independent detective murmured:

"The body of the picture is too far to the left; it does not balance well. But the work is most skillful."

Abel Keene walked over and put a hand on Hawk's shoulder.

"Say, he grunted, 'I'm a fool!'"

Then they looked at each other and smiled.

"I am!" grunted the special. "It was foolish of me to get mad with you. I asked you for your opinion, and you gave it. That's all right. You have a good right to think as you please, and your head is certainly full of ideas. I take back anything unpleasant I have said."

"Don't mention it," nodded Hawk in his easy way. "It's all right."

"You do not agree with me in thinking the missing girl deranged?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Well, I have reasons. In the first place, I have seen her and talked with her since the injury of her father, and I do not believe she is the kind of a girl to be thus easily unbalanced. Not that she appeared strong-minded in one sense, but she certainly was not the sort of a girl to go crazy in such a way."

"Hum. You say you have reasons. There are other points you have not mentioned?"

"Yes."

"Do you see nothing singular in her strange actions while with this young man who was to marry her?"

"Most certainly I do. She was nervous and excited."

"And incoherent. Her talk was rambling and aimless."

"Ah, but I am not so sure of that. She did not tell him just what it was all about, but she knew quite well herself. We have not yet discovered the cause of her remarkable action, but it is my opinion there was a very good reason for her leaving home as she did."

The special officer walked to the further end of the room and back, his eyes on the carpet and his brows lowered.

"You may be right," was his confession. "Some of the things she said certainly make it appear so; but I did not think her that kind of a girl."

Hawk looked surprised and interested.

"What kind of a girl? What do you mean?"

"This is between you and me," said Keene confidentially. "It is merely a surmise; but did you notice she asked him to think kindly of her, no matter what he might hear about her?"

"I did."

"Well, doesn't that strike you as odd?"

"Yes."

"And then again she asked him not to think evil of her."

"So he said."

"Now, that seems to me as if she had fancied he might hear evil of her."

"It looks that way."

"Why should he hear anything of the kind about her? Ah! I fancy I see the stand you have taken, Hawk. You believe this girl involved in an intrigue of some kind. She refused to set the wedding-day. It looks as if she was not anxious to marry him. Possibly she had been forced by her mother to accept the attentions of this young man, who is regarded as a very choice 'catch.' And possibly she has had a secret lover all the while. Ha! Confess that I have probed your theory!"

"Far from it."

Keene looked dismayed and then disgusted.

"I haven't? Then what in the name of the wonderful do you think?"

"I have not fully formed a theory, by any means."

"Well, you are odd! There seems to me but one of two stands to take. Either she ran away in a freak of insanity, or she left home to go with some secret lover. I confess that I am now inclined to lean toward the latter idea, because of her strange words in the two letters to Gerald Valdimer."

Hawk walked to the table on which the letters were lying and picked up the one to Mrs. Gregory.

"Keene," he said, in his impressive way, "it is because of those words to the young man and some things she has written here that I feel sure she has not gone away to join a secret lover. Listen to this: 'I am driven from my home—my dear, dear home! Mark the word 'driven.'"

"Well, what of that? If her parents had been trying to force her into this hateful marriage, would she not consider herself driven from home?"

"She might, but she next says: 'I cannot explain it.' If the marriage was a distasteful one, she would be pretty sure to explain it and protest against it."

"Oh, I am not so sure of that."

"Well, listen to this: 'I go to avert a disgrace that must fall on you and poor father if I remain.' Mark you, she says to avert a disgrace. If she remained, the disgrace would come upon them. There is a point for you to consider."

Keene cleared his throat with a gurgling wheeze, as was his custom and looked knowing, although a puzzled light was faintly showing in the corners of his squinty eyes.

"That does seem a trifle inconsistent with my theory," was his acknowledgment; "but still I am not ready to give it up immediately."

"Then hear this, and note she is speaking of her father: 'I would that I could remain at his side and care for him until he is quite recovered.'"

"Well?"

"Well, this girl loves her father; she is his pet and his pride. Is it not remarkable that she would desert him at this time, when he is suffering from an injury from which he may never recover?"

"That was one thing why I fancied she might be deranged."

"But here comes something else for you to consider. She says, further on: 'I cannot remain here without bringing disgrace on us all, for bribery and hush-money will not keep the dark secret forever buried!'"

Hawk paused and looked inquiringly at the police special, and Abel Keene exclaimed.

"Well, what in blazes did the girl mean?"

"That's the question—that's what we must find out! This is a development of the case that once lost its interest for you. I fancy your interest has returned."

"My interest has returned—fifty per cent. Could it be the girl believed her father guilty of a crime? Did she think he shot Judah Ryswick? By Moses! I believe there is something in that, Hawk! She has been with him and heard his mutterings since he was injured. Perhaps he has confessed that he killed the man in his office."

"But why should she go away on that account? and how can her disappearance prevent disgrace from falling on them all?"

"Hanged if I know!" blurted Keene, as he once more dropped on a chair, mopping his perspiring face with a handkerchief. "It's a regular Chinese puzzle!"

"It is a riddle worth solving, and you should be the very man to solve it," smiled the independent detective.

To this Abel Keene made no reply, and Hawk went on reading from the letter:

"When I kissed father good-night it was also farewell. He will know why I have gone when he is himself again. Tell him I still love him, for all of the black truth. There is something to think about. She says Gregory will know why she went away, and it is evident she did not expect her mother would know. She loves him still, for all of the black truth. What is the black truth?"

"It must be something about the affair in his office."

"It certainly seems so," agreed Hawk; "yet I am not sure of it, by any means. At the same time, I feel confident she would not have left home if that had not happened. That was the beginning, as far as we know, and the whole thing is certainly far out of the ordinary."

Keene was now quite ready to agree with the younger man, for, although Hawk had offered no solution, he had easily shattered all of the police special's theories.

"We will see what we can get out of Mrs. Gregory," said the portly detective.

At that moment, the door opened and the lady mentioned entered the room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PICKING UP A POINT.

THERE was a look of undisguised distress on the face of Mrs. Gregory, but she entered the room with all the dignity of a queen.

"You requested the privilege of speaking

with me?" she said, glancing from one to the other.

Abel Keene bowed most profoundly.

"I did, madam. Will you be seated?"

She sat down. If she had shed any tears since the remarkable disappearance of her daughter, she had seen that all traces of them were carefully removed from her face.

"This is a very sad and distressing affair," she said, touching a dainty lace handkerchief first to one eye and then the other. "It is shocking."

"Truly so, madam," acknowledged Abel Keene. "You have my sympathy."

She drew herself up and looked at him in a way that plainly asked how he, an utter stranger and a common detective, dared have the impudence to offer her sympathy. Then her lips curled a trifle, but the police special's skin was thick, and he did not mind anything like that.

"It is a dreadful publicity," came rather frigidly from the lady's lips. "Every common person in the city will discuss the affair and bandy about my name and that of my daughter. It gives me much distress!"

"In order to get at the facts of the case," said Keene, "I shall have to ask you a great many questions."

"Indeed, sir? Are not the facts plain enough? My daughter was here yesterday, and she is gone now. You have in your hand the letter she left for me. That shows she went away with some singular notion in her head, but what it was I cannot tell."

"It is just that we desire to get at."

"Really! I cannot see what that has to do with finding where she has gone."

"It may have a great deal, madam. If I know why she left home, I believe I shall find it much easier to trace her."

Mrs. Gregory settled back with a sigh of resignation, closing her eyes for a moment and shuddering, as if she dreaded what was to come, and then she spoke:

"Oh, very well; go on."

Keene cleared his throat.

"In the first place, I wish to ask if there has ever been any misunderstanding between yourself and your daughter—any harsh feelings?"

"Not the slightest, sir."

"You have always approved of her choice of companions, particularly of the opposite sex?"

Mrs. Gregory straightened up once more and seemed on the point of remonstrating, but she simply answered:

"I have, sir."

"You approved her engagement with Mr. Gerald Valdimer?"

"I most certainly did. He is of our set, a very fine young man and wealthy."

"Did you have to urge Miss Gregory to accept his attentions?"

There was some hesitation, and then the lady confessed:

"I did at first, but she soon grew to have a sincere regard for him."

"Did she have other suitors before Mr. Valdimer?"

"My daughter, sir, was very popular, for all of her reserve. She could have had as many suitors as she chose. I do not know as she ever had any one particular suitor before Mr. Valdimer."

"But it was through your influence she accepted him?" continued Keene, hammering persistently on that point, as if he still expected to make something out of it, for all of what Hawk had said.

"It was," and she gave him a look that would have cut some men to the quick.

"I thought so."

"I fail to see how this is in any way connected with my daughter's disappearance. I do not care to discuss family affairs with—"

"Once more I assure you I shall ask no questions I do not consider necessary. We often have to pry into family affairs, but we are not reporters. I am seeking to discover the motive that prompted Miss Gregory to leave her home, madam."

The lady fell back and held the handkerchief to her face for a moment.

Hawk was still allowing Keene to take the lead in everything, although there was a look on the private detective's face that plainly said he did not approve of the police special's methods. He believed Keene was wasting valuable time.

"To come directly to the point, Mrs.

Gregory," said Abel. "Have you a suspicion why your daughter left home?"

"Not the least, sir. To my knowledge, there is no reason in the world for her doing such a rash act."

"Did you note anything singular in this letter?"

"Many things."

"Do you note she says at the very start she calls you mother 'for you have in many ways been a mother to me?' Is that not a singular expression to come from her?"

"Very singular. I cannot understand it. I have been a mother to her in *all* ways."

"Just so. You cannot explain her meaning?"

"No, sir."

"What did she mean by saying she was driven from home?"

"Heaven alone can tell!"

Having uttered the words rather excitedly, the lady looked as if ashamed of her own emotion, once more pressing the handkerchief daintily to her eyes.

"She says she goes to avert a disgrace that must fall on you and her father if she remains. What does that mean?"

"You know as well as I."

"What does she mean when she says bribery and hush-money will not keep the dark secret forever buried?"

"She must have been mad!"

"Possibly you are right, but if there is any real reason for those words, I should know it, so I may be able to trace her more readily. Remember what I said: 'We are not reporters.' It is your duty to assist me in this matter as far as possible."

Mrs. Gregory straightened up again.

"I shall do so, sir, but your insinuations are very offensive. You seem to think there is some secret reason for my child's astounding act, but I assure you I know of none. I can only believe her mind has become weakened by the distress it has felt for her father since his accident."

"Possibly your surmise is right, but, speaking of her father, she says: 'Tell him I still love him, for all of the black truth.' It certainly seems as if there is a hidden meaning back of that."

"If there is, I am quite unable to explain it, sir."

Her manner indicated absolute sincerity, and Abel Keene could but believe she was telling the truth. The detective was forced to fall back on his theory that Meda had been deranged when she decided to run away.

"Have you noticed anything unaccountable in your daughter's actions of late?"

"No, sir."

"She has not talked strangely or seemed brooding over anything?"

"No, sir."

"She has not seemed melancholy and distressed?"

"No more than was natural under the circumstances. She had a great deal of the care of her father, as he desired her ever by his side. He has been calling for her for hours now. Very naturally, his misfortune troubled her greatly."

"Oh, yes, quite naturally. Can you not recall some strange incident that is possibly connected with your daughter's disappearance?"

"No—yes! I do not know that it has any connection at all, but it may have possibly."

"What was it?"

"Yesterday afternoon a strange woman called to see Meda. She did not send up a card, I have been told, but a sealed note was taken to my daughter."

"And Miss Gregory saw her?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Did you see the woman?"

"I did."

"How did she look?"

"I cannot tell, for she had a heavy veil over her face."

Abel Keene stole a look at Hawk McKnight, but the private detective was scowling at a peculiar dado on the wall, as if nothing else in the wide world was of any interest to him.

"This woman was not a friend of the family?"

"By no means," stiffly replied Mrs.

Gregory. "I am certain she was an absolute stranger to me."

"How did she appear?"

"She was rather tastily dressed, and—"

"Stout?"

"On the contrary, slender and graceful."

"Did you note the color of her hair?"

"No, sir."

"Did you speak to your daughter after this woman left the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did Miss Gregory appear?"

"Rather agitated," somewhat reluctantly confessed the lady. "I saw her standing at the foot of the stairs with her hands over her face, and I went down. When I spoke to her, she started and uttered a little cry."

"Did you ask her who the woman was?"

"I did."

"And her reply?"

After a bit of hesitation, Mrs. Gregory said:

"She begged me not to ask her."

"She did not tell you?"

"No."

Once more Keene glanced covertly at Hawk. The independent detective's face had cleared and he was nodding cheerfully at the dado, as if quite satisfied with something.

Keene continued the questioning, but he got nothing further of importance from Mrs. Gregory, and he finally said he had nothing more to ask. She had risen to leave the room, when Hawk stepped forward.

"I beg your pardon madam," he said, quietly; "I have one question."

"Very well."

"Did you hear this veiled woman make an appointment with your daughter?"

"Yes, sir."

"When were they to meet?"

"This afternoon at three o'clock."

"Where?"

"In this house."

"That is all, madam."

CHAPTER XXIV.

HAWK IS SHADOWED.

"Well?"

The word fell from Abel Keene's lips when Mrs. Gregory had left the room.

"Yes, very well," nodded Hawk.

"You think—"

"I do."

"This woman has something to do with Meda Gregory's vanishing?"

"Can you doubt it, Keene?"

"Well, it seems possible."

"Not possible—probable."

"Well, have it so. How would you connect her?"

Hawk did not immediately reply, but the look on his face showed he was thinking deeply. When he did speak, it was not to answer Keene's question.

"Up to yesterday there was no sign of anything unusual in Meda Gregory's manner—in fact, up to the time of this woman's appearance at this house. Directly after that she became nervous and excited and said strange and unaccountable things. Last night she disappeared, leaving these letters behind her. The letters are full of hidden meanings, and it scarcely seems possible the veiled woman had nothing to do with the girl's rash act. Mrs. Gregory did not know the woman, and Meda declined to tell who she was."

"All this makes it look very bad for Miss Gregory," asserted Abel Keene.

"In what way?"

"Remember what she said to Gerald Valdimer about not thinking evil of her, no matter what he might hear."

"Well?"

"She went away because of this woman—a strange woman who keeps her face covered."

"What of that?"

"Does it not look as if this woman knew some terrible secret of Meda Gregory's—something the girl feared to have revealed?"

"If you look at it one way, yes. But some things she wrote convince me it is a mistake to think of her thus. The girl has a spotless reputation, and it is not our place to blemish it."

Keene drew himself up haughtily.

"I have no ambition to injure the young

lady in any way. I am simply seeking to get at the truth."

Hawk continued, as if Keene had not spoken at all:

"Enos Gregory is involved in a mysterious and tragic affair. Is it not more probable this woman knew something concerning him and sought to wring hush-money from the girl?"

"But how could the girl save her father by disappearing?"

"Ah! there's the rub! That is what we do not understand. It is plain she thought she could save him, or she would not have disappeared."

"And who was the woman?"

"Haven't you an idea?"

"No. Have you?"

"I have a suspicion."

"Who do you think?"

"There is a certain mysterious Mrs. Claxton mixed up in this affair, and—"

"By Jove! she was the veiled woman, Hawk!"

"It is quite likely, although, if true, she played a most daring game."

"But what hold could she have on Enos Gregory?"

"That is a part of the original mystery. She has *some* hold."

At that moment, Hawk was thinking of the papers stolen from the broker's pocket by Bob the Thug. He was confident those papers had played a prominent part in the driving of Meda Gregory from her home.

What was the nature of the mysterious papers?

He had freely given Abel Keene many points, but something had led him to keep the matter of the papers a secret.

"If we could lay hands on the woman, we might not be able to find the girl," said the police special.

"Certainly not; but we might be able to discover what has led her to this strange act. We might be able to discover the cause of the whole unfortunate affair. This woman and her backers have involved Enos Gregory and his family, and they should be captured and punished."

"Is it not possible to capture her when she appears at this house at three o'clock to-day?"

"She will not appear."

"The appointment was made."

"Still she won't come."

"Why not?"

"We passed two reporters as we came in."

"Ah! The papers—"

"Will have the story, and the woman will take the alarm."

"Still, I shall have a man on the watch for her."

"It will do no harm, if it does no good. If you take Miss Gregory's photograph and description to Headquarters, the police will do what they can to find the girl. While they are on the watch, you can work this case out to suit your own fancy."

"And you?"

"I shall beat you—if I can."

Keene smiled.

"All right," he said. "I will say you are frank about it, and I am beginning to like you, McKnight."

"Thank you."

"You are a different kind of a man that I have always supposed you, and the difference is in your favor. Of course I do not intend to be beaten, and I do not believe you will beat me; but I shall really feel far less injured if you do succeed than I should were you any other man in the profession."

For the moment, Keene had smothered his egotism and appeared in a really favorable light, which showed there was more than one side to his character.

Having secured such information as could be obtained from Mrs. Gregory, the police special questioned the servants; but he obtained very little satisfaction from any of them. He simply found they were not inclined to think Miss Gregory had run away in an attack of temporary insanity, for she was not the kind of a girl to be thus afflicted.

While Keene was questioning the servants, Hawk was discovering what garments were missing from Meda's wardrobe, so he might know how she was dressed when she left the house. He also secured an excellent photograph of her, and from the lips of her

maid, he took note of her description, recording any peculiarity that might distinguish her from other young ladies.

When he left the house, he seemed buried in deep thought. This did not prevent his noting a boy who was lounging on the opposite side of the avenue, further up. This boy was fairly well dressed and apparently about sixteen years of age. When Hawk appeared, the lad showed immediate interest.

Straight to Broadway the independent detective made his way, and, as he turned down the thoroughfare, he discovered by a single glance that the boy was following him.

He was shadowed!

"Well, this is certainly interesting, and it means something!" he thought. "I wonder what the game can be?"

Broadway before noon is not Broadway of three P. M. by any means, and Hawk was able to get another glimpse of the boy by crossing the street and entering a cigar store. He lounged at the counter, chatting with the proprietor, his position commanding a view of the entire street, and he did not have to wait more than five minutes before the boy came slowly along, evidently fearing the detective would leave the store by some side or back way.

Hawk obtained a square view of the young shadow's face, and he made a discovery.

He knew the boy.

It was the artful decoy, Tim Jones, who had led him into the trap in Blood Alley!

CHAPTER XXV.

MOSES THE BEGGAR.

Hawk's interest was instantly redoubled, for he knew that boy was not shadowing him out of idle curiosity.

It meant something.

What?

That was what he hoped to discover.

As the boy strolled past, he carelessly glanced through the plate glass window and saw the detective leaning on the counter. It was no more than a glance, but it was enough to tell him Hawk was still within the store.

The moment the young decoy had passed on from view, Hawk turned to the proprietor of the place, saying:

"Dan, you and I are just about of a build."

"We are, sure."

"This suit of mine is as good as the one you have on."

"I should say it is better."

"I'll give you ten dollars to swap with me right away."

The proprietor of the store was somewhat surprised, but it happened he knew Hawk thoroughly, and he realized it was a case of business with the detective, so he agreed to the trade, in case he was satisfied with the fit of the other's clothes.

The cigar counter was left in charge of a clerk, and the two men stepped into a little back apartment, where they quickly exchanged suits. Then, standing before a mirror, with a few strokes of a pencil and a dash of grease-paint, Hawk made a remarkable change in his appearance. From a case he took forth a fierce drooping mustache which was skillfully attached to his upper lip, and he was soon ready to leave the store.

He was the perfect picture of an old sport of rather loud tastes and an intense craving for strong drink, the sign of which was apparent in his ruddy nose. The cast of his countenance was entirely altered, and he was no more like the rather dapper young man who entered the store than black is like white.

When he appeared on Broadway it did not take him more than ten seconds to locate the boy, who was slowly strolling back, with the apparent intention of passing the store again.

Hawk took a position at a show-window, where he could quietly watch the decoy.

When Tim Jones reached the cigar store he casually glanced in, and then he started with apparent surprise, halting and staring through the window.

The man he was shadowing had disappeared, and the proprietor of the store was likewise gone, Hawk having asked the man to keep out of sight for an hour.

After a moment, the boy walked on a short distance, but the detective could see he was troubled and puzzled. He stood watching the front of the cigar store some minutes and then he walked back. Once more he halted before the store, seeming uncertain about something.

His uncertainty did not last long, for he soon entered the store.

"He's gone in to buy a package of cigarettes and find out what has become of me," thought Hawk.

The clerk had been instructed to say the detective and the proprietor had left by a back door, and, within two minutes, the boy came out, looking thoroughly disgusted. He immediately hailed a cable car and boarded it.

Hawk took the same car, but the lad had little idea the man he had been shadowing was now doing the shadow act in turn. It was a case of the shadower shadowed.

Not wishing to attract the attention of the lad, the detective remained on the rear platform of the car, from which position he was not able to study the boy's face as closely as he wished. However, he saw the young fellow had a rather effeminate appearance, and did not look at all like a young tough. That he was a confirmed smoker of cigarettes, could be told by the discoloration of the first and second fingers of his right hand.

At Grand street the boy left the car, and Hawk did likewise.

Tim Jones walked along Grand street to Baxter, carelessly smoking a cigarette, not once looking back, which showed he did not fancy he was followed.

Down Baxter he went to Hester, and Hawk followed with all the skill of a professional trailer.

On Hester street he stopped and stared at a tenement building across the street. The boy stood staring up at the building so long that Hawk made a note of it, taking down the number.

At length, with a gesture of disgust, the lad lighted another cigarette and strolled on.

He had not gone two blocks before he came face to face with an old white-bearded street-beggar. The old man was asking assistance of the passers, and he hailed the boy, speaking in a whining tone.

"Please give something to a very old man, who has a wife that is starving! Please give Old Moses a few coppers, young sir."

The boy flipped a nickel skillfully into the hat of the beggar, and would have passed on; but Old Moses caught him almost savagely by the arm, peering keenly into his face.

"Let up, you old duffer!" cried the lad, angrily. "I gave you five cents. Is this your thanks?"

"I know you!" cried the beggar.

"You lie!" was the angry retort. "Let go!"

"You are Del—"

Spat! Like a flash the boy struck the old man fairly and squarely in the face!

The beggar staggered a bit, and, with a twisting squirm, the boy broke from his grasp.

This had taken place so quick that Hawk had no chance to interfere, had he so desired.

The moment the boy broke clear he took to his heels and ran toward Grand street.

To the surprise of the detective, Old Moses immediately pursued the lad.

But what astonished Hawk the most was that the aged beggar could run with the nimbleness of a young man!

"Hal!" exclaimed Hawk. "The rascal is in disguise! He is no gray-bearded old mendicant!"

Immediately the detective started in pursuit of the others, intending to witness the result of the race.

The lad was light of foot, and, for all of the beggar's swiftness, he could not overtake his game.

Grand street was reached.

There was a perfect crush of trucks at that point, but the boy did not hesitate about darting in and out among them.

Still the beggar followed, although he raised no outcry.

People stopped to stare, but it happened that no one shouted an order to stop the boy, and the slippery young rascal mys-

teriously vanished amid the throng of teams and people.

The old beggar lost sight of the boy, and then he gave over the pursuit.

Half a dozen persons asked him why he was following the lad, but he only shook his head and muttered a mess of stuff that sounded like some foreign language but was understood by no one.

Hawk was on hand, and he accosted Old Moses, putting a silver quarter into the mendicant's hand.

"Who was that boy?" he asked. "I hope to never break another bank if I don't believe I know him! He's the cut of the young rascal that pulled the jaw off Renwood, and I had me pile on the horse at thirty to one."

The beggar bowed very low and mumbled his thanks, but did not reply to the question.

"Who was he, old sport?" demanded the ferret, his hand falling on the man's shoulder. "Give it to us straight, my boy."

"Oh, I don't know, sir—true, sir."

"Come, come! Don't try to run a bluff on me! Who was he?"

"I tell you the truth, on the word of an honorable gentleman. I have no reason to lie."

"Why did you follow him?"

"He strike me."

"Why did he strike you?"

"I ask him for a little assist for my starving wife."

"He didn't give you anything?"

"Not one cent, the young dog!"

Hawk knew the old beggar was lying, and he also knew the man was not nearly as old as he pretended, for he had discovered the beard was false, and he had seen Moses run.

There was another mystery here, and, as he had lost the boy, he resolved to shadow the beggar.

Realizing it would be useless to try to pump the man any further, he gave him another quarter and walked away.

Reaching a jeweler's show window, he paused to look in, at the same time glancing back.

Moses had vanished!

Instantly, Hawk whirled and walked swiftly back to the corner, being in time to discover Old Moses making his way slowly up Elizabeth street.

"We'll see just what there is in this," thought the shadow, as he sauntered along after the beggar.

At the corner of Broome street the beggar came upon a young woman who wore a veil over her face and was moving hastily toward Broadway.

The Hawk was watching the disguised man closely, and he saw him make a quick gesture that was perceived by the woman, who slightly nodded her head.

Then the beggar turned and followed the woman.

Hawk followed them both, a sudden startling thought surging through his brain:

"A veiled woman! Perhaps it is the one who visited Meda Gregory yesterday! Have I found the missing Mrs. Claxton?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FACE OF THE DEAD.

THAT was an important question, and The Hawk resolved to know the answer to it.

If the veiled woman was Mrs. Claxton, who was the old beggar? Plainly the mendicant was known to the woman, for their signals had been so well arranged the attention of the people passing was not called to them, and no one would have suspected the wretched old beggar was following the tastily-dressed woman because she had signaled him to do so.

One thing was fortunate: they did not seem to fear being followed themselves, and that made Hawk McKnight's task much easier than it would have been otherwise.

They did not go far before the woman turned in at the doorway of a shambling building, on the stoop of which a mob of ragged and dirty children were playing and fighting.

Old Moses did not hesitate about following her, and both disappeared from view.

"Holed!" thought Hawk.

Holed they were, but he was not certain the woman was the missing Mrs. Claxton

any more than he was certain it was Mrs Claxton who had called on Meda Gregory.

The man and the woman were in that building, which sheltered possibly a score of families, but how could he reach them? That was the question that troubled him just then.

He was considering it when he espied a peddler coming along the street with a pack on his back.

"That's the ticket!" thought the ferret. "He's my man!"

The peddler was astonished when he was confronted by the sporty-appearing individual in the check suit and heard that person ask him what he would take for his entire outfit. In fact, the peddler thought he was being insulted.

"Vat for you trouble a poor old man?" he whined, while his eyes shone with resentment. "I neffer do noddings to you, goot Creestian gentleman."

There was deep sarcasm in the words, but the detective minded it not.

"I am in earnest," he said, soberly. "I want to buy your whole pack. You are not having luck, I take it."

"Holy Moses! I haf der vorst luck v'at I nefer did!" was the somewhat savage answer. "I don't efen sell let bencils twelve vor a kvarter! I belief I veel gif up dis peesness und take me to somethi'k else."

"Now's your time. Say what you'll take for the pack and your suit of clothes. I mean it. I want the whole rig."

"You haf moneysh?"

"See here." Hawk displayed a handful of bills, causing the old Jew's eyes to protrude.

"Den va't you vant uf dis pack?"

"That's nothing to you," impatiently. "I can't spend all day here. Set your price and be lively—the pack and the suit you have on."

"If I sell dish suit, how veel I haf some-dings to vear?"

"There's a clothing store one block away on Grand street. You can get out of your clothes there and get into a new suit. I mean business. Set the price—pack and suit."

"Hawk saw there was not much in the pack, and the stock was of the very lowest quality, but that made no difference, as it would serve his purpose as well as anything."

He was working against Abel Keene for a reputation, and he meant to beat the police special at any cost.

"Vell," said the peddler, slowly, "I veel take sefenty-five tollars vor der pack und der suit, und dat vas sheap—verish sheap—so helup me Mosesh."

"I'll give you fifty. Here's the money. Take it or leave it."

"Solomon Isaacs! Dat vas roppery!"

"Take it or leave it." Hawk half-turned away.

"Say, holt on! I'll tage id!"

"Then come down to the clothing store—lively! Get a gait on, uncle!"

Hawk hustled the old peddler down the block and into the store, where he soon made his wants known, and he had a way of securing whatever he desired. In a little room he soon donned the peddler's garments, while the old Jew bought the cheapest suit he could secure. Having yet another disguise in the way of wig and beard, it did not take the detective long to transform himself into a passable Jew, and when he issued forth with the pack, men who had seen him a few minutes before did not know him. He managed to slip away quietly and without attracting attention.

In a short time he was again on Broome street, and he made straight for the house he desired to enter.

Of course he was not certain that the man and woman had not left while he was rearranging his disguise, but he had taken his chances of losing them that way.

He made his way through the mob of dirty children and entered unchallenged. Then came the task of finding the people he sought.

From one part of the house to another he went, being easily turned away from the rooms where he felt certain he would not find the veiled woman or the old beggar.

It was at the very top of the house that he finally rapped on a door, that was opened by the woman he sought.

The missing Mrs. Claxton stood before him!

"Coot day, laty," he said, bowing humbly. "I want to sell you somedings."

"I do not care for anything," she quietly replied.

"You ton'd know v'at I haf in mine pack," he eagerly assured. "I haf eferyt'ing sheap—verish sheap. Maype you helps a poor man vid a family uf sefen small shiltren?"

"Oh, you're a beggar?"

"Holy Mosesh, no! I vas a man uf peesness! I takes no moneysh v'at I ton'd gif you der vort' uf id in goots. Uf you veel puy noddng else, taige tweluf uf dese let bencils vor a kvarter uf a tollar. Shoost let me come in und show you v'at I haf in my pack, laty."

"Oh, very well; come in."

Slightly elated at his success, he entered the room. The furnishings were shabby enough, and the rather beautiful young woman looked sadly out of place there. She was altogether too well-dressed for her surroundings.

That she was pretty and fascinating he discovered almost immediately, although it seemed there was a look of fear deep down in her eyes, and she seemed worried.

As he entered, a man sat up on a lounge, where he had been stretched.

That man was Bob the Thug!

Well might Hawk consider himself fortunate, for he had located the very people who had once given him the slip. Certainly he had distanced Abel Keene at this stage of the game.

Bob was the only person besides the girl in the room, and Hawk wondered if he had played the beggar. It did not seem possible, for the old mendicant had been quite a tall man when he straightened up, while Bob was inclined to be stout and somewhat stubby.

"What yer got there, sis?" half growled the young ruffian.

"Nothing but a peddler."

"Well, we don't want anything. See?"

"Vait till I show you v'at I haf in my pack. Maype den you veel shange your mindt, meester."

"Get out!" snapped the thug, without arising. "I tell you we don't want anything! I wouldn't buy anything of a cursed Jew if I did!"

"Thank you, young meester. You haf a plain vay uf speakin' oudt your mindt, so hellup me Mosesh! Vell, I ton'd sell you noddings; maype I sell the young laty a few. I shoost veel open mine pack." And he had it open before Bob could make another protest.

Growling like a dog over a bone the young rascal stretched himself on the lounge again, lighting a cigarette.

"I s'pose I oughter fire you out on your neck, Jacob," he said; "but I'll spare you this time."

"I tank you, young meester. Maype you pe a shentleman after all."

Bob sat up, as if he had been struck with a whip.

"Now, don't you go to get fresh, Moses!" he snarled, glaring at the disguised detective. "I'll get up and knock a corner off your miserable old carcass!"

Not desiring a fight with the thug, although he did not fear him in the least, Hawk turned his attention to displaying his wares to the young adventuress. Somehow, she seemed strangely interested in all he was saying and showing her, and he saw her now and then glance toward Bob, who was now watching them both as a tiger watches its prey.

Ever suspicious, Hawk took occasion to glance about, so he might know the lay of the ground in case he was attacked. He saw there was another room connected, the door of which was standing wide open.

He saw more than that.

In the mirror he saw the reflection of a man's face—the face of a man who was within the adjoining room.

It was the face of Judah Ryswick, the man who was supposed to have been drowned in the East River!

CHAPTER XXVII.

SNARED.

THE face of the dead!

Hawk saw it fairly, and yet he did not

start or show any emotion. Still, he knew Judah Ryswick, the supposed dead man, was within that adjoining room!

And Ryswick was not dead!

This was not a new discovery for the independent detective, as he had made it the day he visited the Morgue to look on the corpse that had been taken from the river. He had then satisfied himself the body was not that of Ryswick, although there was a strong resemblance.

The body had worn Ryswick's clothes, which plainly told Hawk that the escaped hospital patient had wished to be considered dead, resorting to desperate means to defraud the public. How the body had been obtained and mutilated by a revolver shot on the head was another dark mystery in connection with a most singular and complicated case.

Abel Keene had been deceived, and, on that point, Hawk had not seen fit to enlighten him.

He had fully expected Ryswick would turn up suddenly, and so the knowledge that the man was in the next room had not given him a shock. Instead, his heart was, for the moment, filled with triumph.

Then something in that reflected face did give him a slight shock. He saw it all plainly. The man had his hat off, and a bandage was tied about his head. The full play of his countenance was revealed by the mirror, and Hawk saw anxiety, triumph and hatred written upon it.

Right then the detective became aware that Judah Ryswick knew the pretended peddler was not a peddler.

Ryswick knew the bogus Jew was the independent detective in disguise!

The look on the supposed dead man's face told this as plainly as words could have done.

The hidden rascal was listening eagerly to all that was passing in the adjoining room.

Hawk appeared to give his attention to displaying his wares and descanting on their merits and cheapness, but his mind was fully occupied with the scheming rascal in the smaller room. He paid less heed than usual to Bob, who arose from the lounge and began pacing the floor.

The detective now understood who had played the part of Old Moses the beggar. It was not Bob, but Ryswick.

The young thug walked up and down the room, scarcely seeming to take his eyes from the disguised ferret and the woman; but, for all his surveillance, Hawk suddenly detected a strange look on the face of the mysterious adventuress.

Her eyes were fastened on his, and there was a warning in their depths, as if she would tell him of some unknown peril. He saw her look down at her own fingers, and he looked there also.

Then a strange thing occurred.

Hawk was perfectly familiar with the sign language of the deaf-and-dumb, and, as she handled the goods he displayed, he saw her fingers distinctly spell out these words:

"Danger! Look out for your life!"

That startled him more than anything else that had happened. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his eyes. Was this young woman really warning him of peril?

Just as he had resolved to question her in the same silent manner, keeping up his assumed character all the while, he heard a click behind him and suddenly turned, expecting to see a revolver leveled straight at his brain.

Instead, he saw Bob the Thug standing with his back against the door, which he had just locked, the shooting of the bolt having made the clicking noise.

"Vat vas dat?" exclaimed the bogus peddler.

"Notting," replied Bob, mockingly, imitating Hawk. "Id vas only the snap uf der trap."

"Vat trap?"

"The one you are in, cully. See?"

"I ton'd know v'at you mean. You wants to rob me! I nefer submeet! So helup me, I calls vor der bolice! Open dat door, meester!"

The young tough laughed.

"Oh, don't get excited, my handsome Jew! Keep your clotes on."

"I keeps mein clotes on? Vas you mean

to rob me of mein clothes? Murter! I come in here like a shentleman. V'y you try to robber me?"

Hawk was playing the excited dodge, apparently in a perfect frenzy of sudden and unreasoning fear.

The thug leaned against the door and laughed, puffing out little blue rings of smoke. He was not a bad-looking fellow, despite the fact that an evil light danced in his eyes. Hawk could see his associations had made him a rascal.

All at once, the detective wondered what Judah Ryswick was doing, and, as he hastily scrambled his goods back into the pack, he glanced toward the tell-tale mirror.

The reflection of the supposed dead man's face was no longer to be seen.

That Ryswick was "up to deviltry" Hawk instantly surmised, and also saw the woman's warning had meant a great deal. His life was truly in danger.

And when his eyes returned to Bob the Thug, that interesting young gentleman was toying with a glistening revolver!

"We won't buy anything to speak of today," sneered the young ruffian; "but I may try my hand at pistol practice. I'll give odds that I won't miss you once out of six shots in this room."

Hawk was on his knees, and he lifted up his hands, apparently in the greatest terror.

"Holy Moses!" he wailed, tremblingly. "V'at you mean to do?"

"Cheese it!"

"V'y you say 'sheeze id'?"

"Just take off those whiskers and let's see how you'll look without them."

Still the disguised detective clung to his assumed character.

"You mean vor me to shafe my shin? I nefer do dat, by all der prophets! You haf me look like a Chrestian?"

"Take off them whiskers!" Bob's revolver was now pointing at Hawk's head, and it was steady as a rock in the grip of the desperate young rascal.

At this moment, a man appeared in the doorway of the adjoining room.

To Hawk's surprise, it was Old Moses, the beggar.

Moses did not speak, but he also held a revolver in his grasp, while his eyes were fastened on the insnared man-catcher. He had put on his hat, and the bandage about his head was thus hidden from view.

"You see you are fairly caught," said Bob. "You may as well throw up the sponge, Hawk McKnight."

"I am not in the habit of throwing up the sponge to any great extent," said Hawk, calmly, as he straightened up and removed his disguise. "I confess I walked into your little net, but I don't know what you'll do about it, anyway."

"You will find out pretty soon, cully," triumphantly cried Bob. "I swear that rig was great! I wouldn't have tumbled in a year, but my friend Moses is pretty sharp. He knew you as you played the broken-down sport, and, from a front window, we saw you hail the pack-peddler. Oh, we're a pretty fly crowd around here!"

"Well, what do you propose to do?"

The independent detective put the question coolly and calmly, as if he was really very little concerned.

"We can shoot you."

"You *can*, but you *won't*."

"Why not?"

"You don't dare."

"Don't be too sure, cully!"

"You'd be a fool to do such a trick. It would cost you your life in the electric chair."

"Think so?"

"Know it."

"Well, I'm not so sure of that. You would disappear, and we are the only three persons who could say what had become of you. Murder has been twice done in this house, and the police have yet to find the ones who committed the crimes. Everything is in our favor."

"Don't run any such a bluff as that with me, young man, for it doesn't go. I know you and your whole game from start to finish. And I know *you*!"

With those words, he turned and pointed straight at Old Moses, who had advanced a few steps into the room.

For an instant there was a startled silence, and then the old beggar croaked:

"I am nobody but poor Old Moses."

"You are Judah Ryswick, the chief villain of the whole kit—and *here's the proof!*"

With a spring and a snatch, he tore the false beard from the man's face!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THREE TO ONE.

RYSWICK was unmasked.

The exposed schemer uttered an exclamation of fury and struck at Hawk with his empty hand.

The blow missed, for the detective dodged like a cat.

"You are about as lively a dead man as it has been my pleasure to look on in a long time!" laughed the ferret, retreating a few steps. "You played a slick game, but it didn't go at all with me."

Ryswick was pale with passion.

"You meddling whelp!" he grated, his eyes glittering with a murderous light. "You have been a stumbling-block from the start! We do not fear Abel Keene."

"Thank you for the compliment," bowed Hawk. "I can see it is really sincere."

"The time has come to put you out of the way."

"Think so?"

"It is settled."

"I am not easily disposed of, Mr. Judah Ryswick."

"You will not trouble us after this day."

"Then you will be behind prison bars."

"Look here, McKnight," said Ryswick, with sudden soberness. "I have a proposal to make to you."

Hawk knew what was coming, and repressed a smile with difficulty.

"All right; make it."

"You are a private detective—on your own hook—and I know you are out for the stuff. I don't know exactly why you have tackled this case so fiercely, but I do know we can make it pay you to let up. That is straight. There is money in it."

"Really!"

"On the dead."

"You would buy me off?"

"Sure."

"Well, I have something to tell you, Mr. Judah Ryswick: You can't raise money enough to buy me off! I have tackled this rotten game with the intention of smashing the combination, and I'll go it or slip a cog!"

Ryswick fell back, his hands clinched and a snarl coming from his lips. He looked like a thoroughbred scoundrel just then, and one who would not hesitate at anything that would bring about his ends.

"Take care!" he cried, hoarsely. "You don't know what you are doing, McKnight!"

"Oh, yes I do!"

"You have penetrated my secret—you are the only person outside of this man and this woman who knows I am still alive. I tell you, McKnight, you are sealing your own fate!"

The independent detective did not seem at all alarmed at this threat, but, all the same, he was quite aware his situation was rather desperate. He could see the man before him was really in a dangerous mood, but Hawk had put up a big bluff more than once and succeeded, and he meant to succeed now.

"Look here, Ryswick," he said, quietly, "you may as well know I do not scare for a cent. In fact, I rather like being talked to in this way! I am contrary as a mule, and I have tackled the Gregory case for keeps. I do not exactly know your object in wishing it thought you are dead, but I suppose it is so you may carry out your design of black-mail all the more successfully. You have succeeded in driving Meda Gregory from her home, as you probably know, but I have found you—and now I want those papers!"

He took two steps forward, literally shooting the words from his lips. Ryswick staggered again, gasping:

"Papers?"

He was astounded. What did Hawk know of the papers? How did he know of the papers?

"That's what I said."

"What papers?"

"The ones your tool here stole from Enos Gregory's pocket as the broker lay senseless in the street, stricken down by runaway horses."

"I don't know what you mean."

But his manner gave his words the lie, and Hawk laughed in his face.

"You *do* know what I mean! Give up those papers now, or go to the Penitentiary!"

That was business straight, and there was something so dramatic in Hawk's manner that the chief scoundrel and schemer shuddered and shrunk before the accusing finger fastened fairly upon him.

As for Bob the Thug, he stood dazed and speechless, with his back still braced against the door, as if he feared an intrusion from some one outside.

After a little time, Ryswick forced a harsh laugh cracklingly from his lips, which were dry and blue.

"Now, more than ever, I see we must dispose of you!" he said. "Either you must go down, or we are lost!"

"Give up those papers now, restore Meda Gregory to her home, and I will not molest you for twenty-four hours. With that much start, you ought to be able to keep clear of my grip."

"You ask a good deal."

"In what way?"

"We do not know what has become of Meda Gregory."

"Sure of that?"

"It's dead straight. She fled to escape us."

A thrill of satisfaction ran over Hawk, for those words settled one point. He had been right in surmising the veiled woman had caused Meda's flight. And the secret of it all was—black-mail! Still, he knew not the contents of those papers, which had brought about such an unfortunate occurrence.

"Give up the papers and—"

"Not much!"

"You won't?"

"No! You are no match for us. We have you foul and— Say, sit down in that chair, or I'll blow a hole through you! I mean it, sure as my name is Ryswick!"

Again Hawk looked into the muzzle of Ryswick's leveled revolver; again he saw the dancing devil in the man's evil eyes. The villain pointed to a peculiar chair that stood near the center of the room.

"Well, I don't mind; I am really tired."

The detective would have sat down, but the girl darted forward, uttering a warning cry:

"Don't do it!"

"What's the matter?"

The question came from Hawk's lips; but, just then, with an exclamation of fury, Ryswick wheeled and struck the woman with his open hand, sending her reeling, to trip and fall heavily.

"You miserable cur!"

Unable to restrain himself longer, Hawk leaped on Ryswick, caught the revolver and wrenched it from the fellow's fingers. Then he sent the chief rascal staggering back to fall plump into the very chair he had commanded the detective to occupy.

Click! snap! Out sprung clamps from every side, and Judah Ryswick was a captive, held fast to the chair by bands of steel!

Hawk was really astounded, and he stood staring an instant, exclaiming:

"So *that's* why you wanted me to sit down there! Well, well! Very odd and very ingenious! What's the use to squirm? Don't believe you can get away."

He heard a cry and was able to turn in time to grapple with Bob the Thug.

"Well, my lad, I'll just take you in! You're wanted bad. I've got the chief rascal, and now I have you!"

With a trip and a flip, he sent Bob whirling over to fall heavily on the floor. The young ruffian was pinned there, with the detective's knee on his chest.

"I'll just truss you up safely, Robert," said the triumphant Hawk.

But, he didn't. At that instant he received a blow on the head that felled him senseless to the floor!

CHAPTER XXIX.

UNVAILED.

"KNOCKED OUT!"

The words came thickly from Hawk's lips, as consciousness slowly returned to him.

His head was throbbing with a dull pain and his mind was filled with fancies. Still, through all the strange visions that floated

before him, he seemed to see the sneering, devilish face of Judah Ryswick. For all of the vague fancies, he knew he had been struck on the head and knocked senseless.

By whom?

It did not take him long to answer that question, muddled though his brain was.

The woman—the adventuress—the mysterious Mrs. Claxton had dealt the blow!

She had warned him of danger, but when she saw him getting the best of her brother, after securing Judah Ryswick in the ingenious chair of the steel clamp mechanism, in a fit of frenzy, she had struck the detective with some heavy instrument.

What else had happened? Where was he? Had they made him a prisoner?

Having everything in their hands, Hawk believed they would certainly secure him until they had succeeded with their crooked game, or would dispose of him for good and all.

Imagine his astonishment to find himself free and lying on the floor of the room where he had received the heavy blow on the head!

Putting up his hand, he took it away covered with blood, and he realized his head was cut. Carefully feeling of the gash, he soon discovered it was really slight, although it had bled profusely.

Then he sat up and looked around.

"Yes, it was the same room in the tenement-house, and he could hear an occasional whoop from the dirty children who were playing on the front stoop, while the rumbling roar of the street came dull and muffled to his ears.

Yet he was not a captive. There were no bars to the windows, through one of which the sunlight was now reflected from the glittering glass of a distant roof skylight.

He was alone. The two men and the woman had vanished, leaving him there.

The mysterious chair of the steel clamps was also gone, and, but for his bleeding hand, the entire adventure would have seemed like a hazy dream.

"Well, this gets me!" he muttered, with a faint shake of the injured head, which made the pain throb again and caused him to draw his face in a grimace. "Had me dead to rights and didn't take advantage of it! Well, well, well!"

Really astonished to find himself alive, he arose to his feet and looked about. The miserable furnishings of the room were the same, but the chair that had held Ryswick captive was gone. That had disappeared with the shady characters so lately there.

Without delay, the independent detective tried the door to see if it was fastened.

It was unlocked, and he could walk out of the room and the building when he chose to do so.

"Something kept them from carrying out their design on my life," he said to himself. "It is singular they should spare me after having me so completely in their clutches, unless they have much less nerve about shedding blood than they would have me believe. It is possible they feared to injure me further than they had. And still Ryswick must have fancied I would make the knowledge of his escape from death known to the public, and so balk him in one part of his design."

Somehow, he felt that the woman had saved him, even though it was her hand that struck him senseless. She must have felt a horror of shedding blood, desperate and abandoned though she had proved herself.

Then there was the bare possibility that the trio had fancied him fatally injured by the blow, although it was scarcely probable.

A glance at his watch showed him he had been lying in a senseless condition for at least an hour.

"Time enough for them to get quite away and cover their tracks. Once more I'm right where I was before. And I had the gang in my grasp!"

He felt anything but pleased with the result of the affair, even though he had been spared.

Rearranging his disguise, he picked up his pack, making sure there were no signs of blood on his face, and then left the room.

In vain he questioned the other people in the house about the persons who had occu-

pied those rooms. No one seemed to know anything of them, and all declared they had seen no one, answering the description he gave, leave the building within the hour.

He returned to the rooms and searched them all thoroughly for something that would aid him, but he found nothing. It really seemed as if the people he sought had not been there at all.

Altering his disguise in a measure and leaving the pack behind he set out to interview the landlord. The man was not hard to find, but he knew nothing of the people who had occupied the rooms, save that they were engaged by a young woman who wore a veil, and she had deposited two weeks' rent in advance.

The children about the stoop could tell Hawk nothing. At least they seemed unable to tell him anything.

Thoroughly disgusted, the detective scarcely knew which way to turn. He was inclined to remain in concealment where he could watch the house, but, realizing there was a back way to leave the building, he saw the folly of spending his time thus.

While he was shadowing that house Abel Keene might be on the track of the missing Meda.

Had Hawk possessed a trusty assistant, he would have placed a shadow on the Broome street house. As it was, he was obliged to hustle for himself, and he decided to let the house go for the time.

He did a great deal of still hunting that day, but when night came Meda Gregory had not been found.

The police believed the girl had left the city, and they had, they claimed, traced her to Philadelphia, where she had disappeared.

Strangely enough, Hawk McKnight believed Meda was still in New York. He had certain reasons for thinking so, but he did not make his reasons known.

Exhausted, at last, he was forced to seek slumber and recuperation, even though harassed by the fear that Keene would score a point in the big game.

With the coming of another day, the independent detective was once more hard at work, having learned that the mystery of Meda's vanishing was still unsolved.

In the guise of a respectable-appearing elderly gentleman, he again sought the Broome street house and attempted to get on the track of his game. He did not succeed in tracing the trio, but found an urchin who declared that he had seen the veiled woman leave the house the day before. As near as Hawk could discover, this happened while he was lying senseless in the room beneath the roof. The boy had not followed her, and her trail was lost when she stepped to the walk and passed along the street.

Another day of fruitless work was put in, and when night came, Hawk's only satisfaction was in knowing his rival had made apparently as little progress as himself.

That night something took him to Hester street, and he sought the house at which he had seen the decoy, Tim Jones, staring the previous day.

He came up slowly, his eyes taking in everything on the street, and did not fail to note a figure that crouched in the blackness of a dense shadow opposite the very house he had come to watch.

It was not many moments before the detective decided that the person in the shadow was on the watch for somebody or something.

Feeling secure in his disguise, Hawk walked down on that side of the street, moving along slowly and leaning somewhat heavily on his cane, as an elderly person might do. When he was close to the watcher, he looked sharply at him and made a discovery.

Not the least emotion did the detective display, although that glance had revealed to him that the watcher was none other than the boy, Tim Jones!

Why was the decoy shadowing that house?

Hawk passed slowly onward, wondering what it could mean. He resolved to find out.

Although the old man turned a corner and disappeared, he did not go far; but Tim Jones little dreamed he himself was shadowed.

Such was the case.

For more than an hour Hawk watched the boy, who seemed waiting with the utmost patience. The detective was not sure he was not throwing away valuable time, but, at any rate, he had his eye on the decoy.

And Tim might be able to tell something of great importance in case he could be induced to speak.

At length, a feminine figure came out of the house the lad was watching.

Hawk saw the woman appear, and noticed that Tim Jones made a move as if aroused and interested.

Then the detective watched until the veiled female passed beneath a street lamp.

With some difficulty, he repressed an exclamation of satisfaction, and he did softly mutter.

"Mrs. Claxton for all the world!"

He felt fully rewarded for the time he had spent in shadowing the decoy, and when Tim Jones started after the veiled female, Hawk was not far behind.

The boy hurried forward and overtook the woman, touching her lightly on the arm and speaking some words the detective was too far away to catch.

The woman started back with a low cry, and she would have fled, but the boy commanded her to stop.

"Show me your face!" commanded Tim Jones.

Then the frightened woman did run, but she stumbled and nearly fell on her face, recovering and clinging to an iron fence, directly beneath a street lamp.

With remarkable swiftness, the decoy darted forward and snatched the veil from her face.

"Ah! I thought so!" he triumphantly cried.

But, Hawk had *not* thought so, and the detective was utterly dumfounded for the time being.

For the female thus unmasked was *not* the mysterious Mrs. Claxton!

It was Meda, the missing!

CHAPTER XXX.

HAPPENINGS ON HESTER STREET.

THE detective was so astonished that he halted for an instant and stared at the handsome but pallid face thus exposed beneath the light of the street lamp.

"Meda Gregory!"

It seemed the exclamation was heard by both the girl and the boy, for they glanced toward him in alarm.

Then Hawk darted forward.

Meda started to run.

"Stop!" cried the detective. "*I am a friend.*"

But, she did not hear, or, hearing, did not heed the cry.

Tim Jones, with a sharp cry, flung himself directly in the detective's path, and Hawk was tripped and sent headlong to the stone walk, being stunned for the moment.

The meddlesome and crafty decoy darted away, satisfied with the result of his act.

The overthrown man got upon his feet quickly and looked for Meda. He could have overtaken the boy, but it was much more important that he should secure the broker's daughter.

He saw a slender form disappearing beyond a corner, and promptly ran after it, although his left knee had been bruised and injured by the fall.

The next street was dark, but Hawk darted down its shadowy space, his eyes wide open for the fleeing girl. He saw several moving forms, but not one of them was Meda, and, by the time he had run on for half a minute, he realized that Enos Gregory's daughter had given him the slip somehow, for she could not still be ahead of him.

He turned back, peering in at dark doorways and looking down an unlighted alley.

He was intensely angry when he thought of the trick played on him by the meddlesome decoy, and Tim Jones would have received a shaking had he fallen into the hands of the detective just then.

But, Tim had also disappeared, and Hawk began to believe himself baffled again in a most aggravating manner.

For more than an hour he searched, but not another glimpse of the missing girl did he get, and he was finally forced to acknowledge to himself that she had slipped through his fingers.

But he had discovered he was right in his belief that she had not left the city, and the police were on a false scent, probably having traced some other girl to Philadelphia.

With great discernment, Meda had foreseen that the people would suppose immediate flight her intention, and, knowing the avenues from New York would be watched, she had decided to hide in the city until she could get away unhindered.

But, who was Tim Jones? How was the boy connected with the singular case?

The detective began to realize the decoy was something of a mystery.

Although disgusted, Hawk was not downcast, and he returned covertly to the vicinity of the Hester street house in which the girl had been stopping, it being his belief that she would venture back there that night.

Indeed, he knew the girl could not obtain shelter at any respectable hotel in the city if she applied without escort after ten o'clock at night. Not only that, but she would not dare go to a respectable hotel, as she might be recognized.

He knew how distasteful to her must be the surroundings to which she had fled, as she was delicate and dainty in every way, having been reared in luxury.

He could not understand how she could endure the squalor and vice of Hester street.

Returning to a spot where he could watch the house, he concealed himself in a dark doorway and waited.

Not a person passed along the street that was not closely scrutinized by the hidden detective.

Policemen seldom patrolled that section of the street, but one sauntered past as Hawk waited in concealment.

Within thirty minutes, he became aware another person was watching the passers-by, being protected by a doorway at the opposite side of the way.

Who this person was Hawk could not tell, and he did not venture forth to discover, believing it best to lay low and wait for events to transpire.

An hour passed.

Among others, a man came along the street and slouched past the concealed detective. He was roughly-dressed and had a wide-brimmed hat pulled low over his eyes, shading his face.

There was something in his appearance that attracted the notice of The Hawk.

The man passed on, but, within ten minutes, he returned and passed along the street again.

"Wonder if he will come back?" thought Hawk.

The question was soon answered, for the man appeared the third time, walking with a shambling step and looking across at the house the detective was shadowing.

"I believe he is watching that place, too," was Hawk's mental observation.

All at once, the figure that had been concealed in the opposite doorway darted out and came across the street, confronting the man of the slouch hat within two rods of where Hawk was standing in the doorway.

As this individual crossed the street, a sudden feeling of satisfaction ran over the detective, for he recognized Tim the decoy.

The boy had returned to that locality and was playing the shadow again.

Stopping directly in front of the man who wore the slouch hat, the lad said:

"Say, mister, give me a match."

"Get out!" was the surly retort, uttered in a growling tone. "I'll put the police on ye! Want to set somebody's house afire, I'll bet!"

The boy gave a cry of triumph.

"You can't fool me!" he declared. "I know you, for all of your clothes and that attempt at disguising your voice! You meant to turn me over to the police yesterday, but I gave you the slip in great shape. You're a coward and a miserable wretch, Fred Wayne!"

"I can't turn you over to the police, eh?" snarled the man. "Well, I can break you!"

"You don't dare! I ran from you yesterday, but I won't run to-night!"

"Won't!"

"Not any!"

"You cat!"

"You have changed your tune! You used to call me prettier names when we stood by each other in the old days. That was before you saw my sister, to her undoing! It is night now, and I have this!"

With difficulty the boy was holding his voice at a low pitch, so he would not attract attention.

As he uttered the last word, he suddenly snatched a revolver from his pocket and pointed it at Wayne.

The man dodged, struck up the hand, and then his fist shot out, striking the boy fairly between the eyes.

Tim Jones was knocked down in the twinkling of an eye, and lay still on the stones, stunned by the shock, the revolver having fallen from his fingers without exploding.

"I ought to finish the job!" hoarsely whispered the man, as he started to bend over the unlucky lad.

Hawk McKnight now sprang out from his place of concealment, and, seeing him, the fellow turned and walked swiftly away.

The detective raised no outcry, for he knew the boy had not been seriously injured by the blow. Instead of making any fuss, or attempting to stop the man, he darted across the street and started to shadow Wayne. He knew the task would be a difficult one at the start, for the man had seen him come out of the doorway, and so might fear pursuit; but the street and the shadows were favorable, and he hoped to succeed.

He was not wasting his time, as he very well knew, for he had recognized the man confronted by Tim Jones.

The boy had called him "Fred Wayne."

Hawk McKnight knew him as Judah Ryswick!

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE EXTEMPORE VAGABOND.

"Do you stop there?"

The question came from Hawk's lips, and was addressed to no one in particular.

He had traced Judah Ryswick to a saloon away over in a slum section of the East Side, down by the river front, and he uttered the words as the rascally schemer disappeared beyond the swinging doors.

The detective hesitated about following the man he was shadowing, knowing his appearance was rather too respectable for that locality, and he did not have a change of disguise at hand.

What should he do?

He was standing beside an ash-barrel, and something on the top of it attracted his attention. He picked it up and discovered it was an old hat.

"Good!"

His own hat went into the ash-barrel in a moment, and the other went onto his head.

Then he stooped and tore a hole in the knee of his pants, and another on the side of the other leg.

His coat was shabby enough, but neatly brushed. This he soon remedied by taking it off and dragging it in the dust of the street.

He smeared his pants with handfuls of ashes, brushing them and rubbing the dirt in until he imagined he must look as if he had just crept out of a cellar where he had been hiding.

"Reckon I'll do."

With that, he assumed a sneaky air and slouched into the saloon, hesitating in the doorway and looking around, as if he feared to meet some one.

Hawk's appearance had undergone a most remarkable alteration in the last few minutes, and he looked not the least like the respectable old gentleman who had shadowed the house on Hester street.

He now looked like a tramp, a bum, a miserable old wretch who had done something that made him fear the grasp of the law, as his furtive glances plainly appeared to indicate.

Apparently seeing no one in the saloon that he feared, the detective sneaked in and stole up to the bar with a cat-like tread.

Fishing in his pocket, he produced a nickel and placed it gently before the barkeeper, his hand shaking as he did so, while, in a husky tone, he spoke one word:

"Beer."

"Schooner?" questioned the barkeeper.

"A tub, ef I kin git it fer that," huskily replied the disguised detective.

The dispenser of drinks drew a big schooner of beer and placed it before the seemingly wretched old bummer.

Hawk's hands shook so he spilled some of the liquid, as he almost fiercely grasped the schooner and began turning it down at great gulps, as if he had not tasted anything of the sort for hours and was consumed by intense and raging thirst.

"You're pretty dry, old boy," commented the barkeeper.

"Dry!" gasped Hawk, as he restored the empty glass to the bar and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "I'm parched! Gimme 'nother."

"Got mon'?"

"Course I have! W'at ye take me fer!" Then he hastily added: "It's mine! I got it honest!"

"Oh, of course!" coarsely laughed the man behind the bar. "You're a dead honest mug; I can see that by the look of ye. Show yer change."

"Here."

Another nickel was shoved across the bar, and the schooner was filled again, the barkeeper not taking the trouble to rinse it out.

Apparently with as great eagerness as before, Hawk turned down the second glass, scarcely seeming to catch his breath until the last drop had vanished. He gave a sigh of regret as he placed the foot-high schooner on the bar, gazing pensively at it.

"Oh, ef I was rich!" he muttered, seeming to speak to himself. "I'd buy a brewery! I'd own a private distillery! I'd—"

"Have jim-jams," cut in the barkeeper.

"Who spoke to you?" huskily demanded the disguised detective, as he straightened up with apparent anger. "It'd be my own biz. If I died that way, why I'd die—"

"Happy."

"Bet yer life! An' it wouldn't be nobody's biz. I uster be a gentleman—I did. Think I lie?"

"Of course not, old boy. You're a second George."

"Well, I did! I drank champagne then—Mumm's extry dry. Took six cocktails a day to start with; got to taking twelve—then twenty. Oh, I was a sport! An' now look at me!" ending with a doleful whine and a wheeze in his throat, as if his voice had been burnt out with drink of a fiery nature.

"Never mind your past history," cut in the barkeeper, shutting him off. "Here comes some custom. Get away from the bar."

The disguised detective sneaked back with a shuffling step, peering sharply at the three tough-appearing young men who entered together.

Hawk had spotted Judah Ryswick as soon as he got inside the saloon. The tricky rascal was sitting at one of the round tables placed for customers who preferred sitting.

The tables were supposed to be in an apartment separated from the bar, but there was a wide open archway between the two rooms, and the shadow could see his man plainly enough.

There were others sitting about the tables, both men and women, all of the tough East Side class. The men and women were talking and laughing in a coarse manner, with the exception of Ryswick, who was rather apart from the others, apparently not caring to mingle with the gang.

Hawk fancied he was there by appointment, and he seemed to be waiting for somebody.

Edging up to the waiter who was carrying drinks from the bar to the adjoining room, Hawk huskily said:

"I've made a strike, partner. Bring out two beers—one fer yerself."

Then he sneaked into the back room and sat down at one of the tables, not far from Ryswick.

The schemer gave the detective a look, but he did not recognize Hawk.

The waiter brought the beer, and the shadow had a dime ready.

Hawk did not drink the liquid this time, finding occasion to secretly empty it into a saw-dust filled box that served as a cuspidore.

He sat there and muttered to himself for a time, as if in a maudlin state, and then allowed his head to drop forward on his arms.

Within two minutes a man came in and walked straight up to Ryswick. Then the detective heard the following cautious but excited conversation:

"Got the girl, old man!"

"What girl—Leona?"

"No. Old Gregory's daughter!"

"What?"

"Dead straight."

"Where'd you strike her, for Heaven's sake?"

"Wandering about the streets like a lost soul."

"Alone?"

"Sure."

"How did she come to be doing such a thing?"

"Don't know."

"Didn't you find out?"

"Couldn't. She's all muddled up and in a terrible state of mind. She seems nearly frightened out of her wits, an' I t'ink she's 'bout half daft. She didn't know which way ter turn. I near had a spasm when I saw who she was."

"I should think you might! How'd you happen to strike her?"

"Saw a trim rig sailin' along an' actin' rather queer. Looked too well togged fer this locality. I follered her, meanin' to make a catch, if she was on to it. But blowed if I didn't begin to t'ink she was goin' to take a soak in the river! She acted that way."

"You spoke to her?"

"You bet!"

"What then?"

"I saw who she was, though I'd never put me eyes on her but once."

"Was she frightened?"

"Was she? I should observe! She was goin' to run, but I talked smooth and made her think I was a fine feller."

"Then what?"

"She said she was an orphan—didn't have no home nor place to stop. I told her of a nice cheap boardin'-house I knew, and—well, she's there."

"Got her?"

"Dead safe."

"What luck!"

"Come around and see her."

"I'll do it. She don't know me. Let's have a drink, and then we'll—" The listening detective did not hear any more, as the two had moved out toward the bar at which they ordered drinks.

"Great Scott! What luck!" thought Hawk, as he turned his head so he could watch the two rascals. "If I ain't tripped again this night, I'll have Meda Gregory in her own home long before morning."

The man who had brought this important information to Judah Ryswick was Bob the Thug.

As the detective was watching the two men take their drinks, the waiter came along and gave him a punch in the ribs, saying savagely:

"Get up, old man! This ain't no lodgin'-house! You can't sleep on these tables. See?"

"Don't I pay my way?" whined Hawk, with a sidelong look at the waiter. "Didn't I order—"

"Two beers! T'ink dat includes a night's lodgin'? Git up an' shuffle out!"

"I'm a gentleman—"

"Git!"

"This is an outrage on a gentleman, and I'll—"

"Git!"

The waiter had put down his tray of glasses and struck a belligerent attitude, it plainly being his intention to give the old man a thumping.

"Would you hit a poor old gentleman like me?" whimpered Hawk, cowering, but apparently resentful and determined not to be driven.

"Would I? Take that!"

But the blow did not touch the "poor old gentleman," who suddenly dodged and countered in a most surprising manner, knocking over the fighting waiter in a twinkling.

The result was so unexpected and astonishing that everybody, including the waiter, was stunned for the time.

When they recovered, the deceptive old man had vanished through a side door.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ANOTHER STRUGGLE.

OCCASIONALLY Hawk McKnight took great satisfaction in punishing a tough who was inclined to impose on the weak and helpless, and he laughed to himself as he dodged out of the side door and darted across the street, where he concealed himself in the darkness at the mouth of a narrow alley.

"I didn't hit him half hard enough," he muttered. "He's the kind that will knock an old man down and then jump on him. Had I been what I seemed, I would have received a black eye and been fired out on my neck."

Watching from the place of concealment, he saw the waiter come out by the side door and look all around for the "old gentleman," and he heard the fellow utter language that would not look at all well in print.

As the one he sought had disappeared, the waiter returned to the tough saloon, one hand pressed over the eye that had felt the force of the disguised detective's fist.

Twenty seconds later, Judah Ryswick and Bob Darcy came out and moved away together.

Hawk did not have the least difficulty in following the men, as they anticipated nothing of the kind.

Straight to a wretched locality on Water street they proceeded, entering a deserted appearing building, around which a dark figure occasionally skulked.

The men passed in without ceremony, and Hawk did not hesitate to follow them. He found no trouble in passing the door, and no one barred his way when he was inside, although he heard an occasional voice in some of the rooms.

Ryswick and Darcy had disappeared.

Then it was that the detective thought of turning back and seeking the assistance of the police. This he would have done but, just as he was on the point of leaving the house, a muffled cry came from some distant room. It sounded like the voice of a female, and Hawk's blood boiled when he thought of Meda Gregory being completely at the mercies of the two villains into whose hands she had fallen.

"I can't spend the time to get together policemen," was his thought. "I must prove myself a match for those scoundrels."

He sought the part of the building from whence he had fancied the sound issued, and, as he was listening at a door, another cry came to his ears.

It was from the lips of a woman, and, without doubt, she was in peril.

"Help!"

The shriek came from beyond the door.

Flinging himself forward, the detective burst the door open and reeled into the room, catching at the knob for support, as he huskily exclaimed:

"Thash me! I'm allus—hic!—reddy to help the ladiesh. Anybody need any of my—hic!—sishtance here?"

He had found his game!

Beyond a table, where she had retreated in terror, crouched Meda Gregory, her eyes full of horror, fastened on Bob Darcy, who had been following her up, a leering smile on his face.

Bob was pretty full, as the disguised detective saw at a glance, and the young thug was ready for anything, his worst passions having been aroused by the liquor he had swallowed.

Judah Ryswick, the slouch hat pulled far down over his face, which needed the attention of a barber, was seated astride a chair, serenely watching what was taking place.

The two villains were startled by the sudden bursting into the room of a disreputable appearing old man, whose hat was stuck far back on his head and who seemed "loaded to the muzzle."

The girl hailed Hawk's appearance with another appeal for aid.

"Don't let this wretch touch me!" she implored. "He has deceived me! He told me this was a respectable boarding-house."

"So it was, m'dear," cheerfully nodded the detective, still clinging to the door. "Was it in pasht tense. Ushed ter go to—hic!—school. Hain't nobodyish fool; only been—hic!—takin' little something to wet m' whistle. Neck got so dol-darn dry it squeaked.—Hic!—Fact, I swear!"

"Get out of this, you drunken fool!" cried Ryswick.

Bob Darcy turned, an ugly look on his face, his hands clinched.

"Pop the old rat over, Wayne!" he advised. "Give him a smack in the kisser!"

Hawk instantly pretended to brace up with drunken soberness and anger, slamming the broken door behind him and lifting his clinched fists in an awkward "guard."

"Come on!" he huskily cried, punching the air and nearly losing his balance. "I'm jesht the old—hic!—boy that can give you a picnic! Come over an' fan the old man a few an' see where you'll be! I'll knock—hic!—sheventeen kinds of stuffin' out of ye!"

The aspect of the apparently intoxicated but belligerent old fellow was so ludicrous that the two scoundrels could not repress their smiles.

"Look at him!" laughed Ryswick. "Ain't he a bird! Oh, there's a fighter for you!"

"Let me get a crack at his nut!" cried Bob, as he turned from the terrified girl. "I'll do him up in short order."

"Bet ye two dol—hic!—dollars to ten shents you can't touch the old man," nodded Hawk, still fanning the air. "I'm a schlugger, I be! Took lessons off ole man Heenan. My left is wuss'n John L.'s."

"Hanged if this isn't the old fellow that knocked down the waiter in McDogal's!" came from Ryswick's lips.

"No. Is it?"

"Sure!"

"That's me," agreed Hawk, showing pride. "Wash—hic!—you fellersh there? Oh, I'm a corker!"

"Do you belong around here?"

"B'long right in zish house."

"Never saw you before."

"Don't make a dit of bifference—hic! You can look at me now."

"We don't want any row with you. Get out of here lively, and we won't hurt you."

"Do shay!" squawked the disguised detective, derisively. "I'm an old man, but—hic!—I'm the pertecter of female innercence. What you doin' to thash gal?"

"Oh, it's no use to fool with him! I'll cook him!" snarled Bob, as he made a run at Hawk.

It seemed as if the thug would get in his work in a moment, but never was a man more deceived in all his life. Hawk dodged the lunge Bob made, and the detective returned a hot one that caught the young scoundrel fairly on the jaw. It was a telling blow, and Bob was literally lifted from his feet and hurled prostrate to the floor.

Then Hawk made a dash at Ryswick, who was on his feet, quite astounded by what he had seen.

The chief rascal caught up a chair and hurled it straight at the detective's head.

Hawk did not dodge, but he caught the chair fairly in his hands and was unharmed, although he staggered back a step, his rush being checked.

"I'm the soonest old man you two whelps of Satan ever struck!" he cried, flinging the chair aside.

"Good Heaven!" gasped Ryswick, retreating to the wall. "I believe it's that infernal detective, The Hawk!"

"The Hawk it is, my beauties, and he has you foul this time!"

"Not much!"

Bob the Thug struggled to his feet, fairly foaming with fury.

"We spared you once, but there is no woman here to save you now!"

"And there is no woman here to save you. But for her, I would have raked you both the other time."

There was no time for further talk, as the two rascals, by a preconcerted signal, sprung at the detective.

With a bound, Hawk caught up the chair Ryswick had flung at him, and, sweeping it around his head, dashed it at Bob Darcy's face.

The young thug partially dodged the chair, but in doing so he slipped, and down he went before a glancing blow from the missile.

Ryswick attempted to grapple with Hawk, and was successful in a measure, although the detective broke his hold almost immediately.

In the midst of the confusion, the girl slipped unnoticed from the room, leaving the three men battling desperately.

It did not take Hawk long to convince the two rascals he was more than the match for them both, and Ryswick pantingly called:

"Bob!"

"What is it?"

"Call up the gang! He'll do us if you don't!"

Then a shrill whistle came from Bob Darcy's lips, a signal that could be plainly heard in every part of the old building.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Ryswick. "That'll bring a dozen good men to our aid! You're done for this time, Hawk McKnight!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN HOUR OF PERIL.

As he heard the taunting, triumphant words of Judah Ryswick a sudden thought came to the independent detective. He had often heard of an East Side thieves' den known as "The Ark," and now something told him he was in that trap of iniquity.

If so, his peril was certainly great, for the gang that resorted in The Ark was one of most desperate known to the Metropolis since the extinction of the dreaded Whyos.

It had been his intention to clean out The Ark Gang some day, but he had never yet found time to give the work.

Now, he regretted he had not paused to secure the assistance of the police in his daring work of that night, although it was his policy to go it alone whenever he could.

He wondered what would be the fate of the unfortunate girl, and then, for the first time, he realized Meda was not in the room. She had fled some time before, but would she escape from the house and find her way to a place of safety?

Fortune had stood by him all his life, and he could not believe she would desert him now in his hour of great peril.

Fiercely he fought to overcome his two foes before the thieves, members of the Ark Gang, came thronging to that room, called there by Bob Darcy's signal.

His enemies anticipated his design, and their only efforts were to prevent him from succeeding.

"No you don't!" cried Bob, triumphantly. "You are in for it this time, Mr. Hawk!"

"Never be sure of your bird until you have it trapped," returned the dauntless detective. "You can never tell what will happen."

"We've got ye!"

"Perhaps I have you."

"Not much! Hark!"

From various parts of the old building, which had seemed so dark and deserted, came answering signal whistles and the sound of hurrying feet.

"They're coming!"

Yes, the gang was coming! There was no doubt of that, and Hawk redoubled his efforts. With one terrible blow, he broke Ryswick's hold and crushed the panting villain to the floor.

But Bob had obtained a hold at Hawk's back, and there he clung like a leech, panting but triumphant, laughing evilly. His one mad desire now was to crush this detective who had given them so much trouble. Whatever was done in The Ark was apt to remain a secret from the rest of the world, for there was an opening into a sewer down in the cellar, and from that dark spot more than one stiff had been sent to float out upon the bosom of the East River and add to the tragic and unsolved mysteries of "Wicked Gotham."

Hawk succeeded in getting his hand into his pocket, and he drew forth a clasp-knife, which he quickly opened, well aware that swift work might save his life.

With a slash, he drew the blade across the young thug's knuckles, and, uttering a howl of pain and fury, Bob Darcy relaxed his hold.

Hawk wheeled toward the door, which, at that instant, was flung back on its one unboken hinge, revealing the faces of five or six a villainous-appearing scoundrels as ever disgraced humanity.

Bob was dancing and clinging to his bleeding left hand, but he saw the faces at

the door, and a cry of delight broke from his lips. Pointing at Hawk, he cried:

"Know that man?"

"No," was the universal answer, as the gang came swarming into the room. "Who is he?"

"That's The Night Hawk!"

For one instant it seemed as if those words would produce a panic among the crooks, but Bob swiftly added:

"We've got him! He's trapped, and he can't get away! He's alone!"

Then a muttering snarl came from the lips of the gang, nearly every man of whom was a jail-bird with a score against Hawk McKnight. Fierce looks were turned on him, and the hands of the mob sought their weapons, while they seemed ready to a man to launch themselves at the throat of the snared detective.

Hawk saw he was fairly trapped. There was but one window in the room, and he knew not what lay outside the window. He could not take any ventures in that direction, and his only course was to make as stiff a bluff as possible, and then, if he must go under, do so fighting like a man.

With a spring, he went over the top of a square table and placed his back against the wall. As by magic, a revolver had appeared in his hand, which seemed steady as a rock, for all of his recent fierce exertions and the great peril he was in at that instant!

As he turned his face toward the gang, there was a look in his eyes that revealed how ready he was to make a dead-game fight of it then and there. The men who confronted him knew they would not down him without loss to themselves.

"If you fellows think you're going to have any picnic in corralling me, just walk right up to the dough-dish and see," he calmly observed, without once lifting the revolver he held. "I'll agree to make it very interesting for you, to say the very least."

Ryswick had arisen to his feet, but he stood rubbing his head and looking at Hawk in a dazed way, making no move and uttering not a word.

Bob Darcy did the talking. He urged the gang to make a rush for the detective and overcome Hawk at once, offering to lead if they would follow.

"That's right," said the detective. "You are the one I want to take the lead. I will put a bullet through you the first thing I do."

That cooled Bob's ardor somewhat, for he was not at all anxious to become a target for Hawk to practice on with his revolver, as he had heard the detective was an unerring shot.

The gang hesitated, too, well aware the cornered man held six lives in his hand. Still, they were inclined to keep pressing forward inch by inch, and the detective saw they would reach a point where he would have no more than time to fire a single shot before he was in the grasp of the leaders.

"Back!" he cried, menacing them for the first time with the weapon. "Keep off, or I will open upon you!"

Bob Darcy was snarling and raging, but fell back before that weapon, wrapping a handkerchief about his fingers, which were bleeding copiously.

"Reckon we'll have to shoot him where he is," said Judah Ryswick, whose head had begun to clear. "Will the shot bring an investigation, Darcy?"

"Bring nothing! Nobody comes nosing around this house at this time of night. The policeman that has this beat keeps at a safe distance, and he wouldn't poke around if he heard a cannon. We kin do this mug an' nobody'll be the wiser."

"That is where you make a big mistake," calmly observed Hawk, actually smiling in the face of the scowling gang. "You can't shoot me or wipe me out in any way without receiving just punishment for it. I am too well known."

"You're not on ther reg'lar police or detective force, an' you've got any amount of enemies 'mongst ther reg'lers," said Bob. "I guess they wouldn't boder their heads to any great extent about you."

"Guess again. You didn't hit it that time. Although I'm not a regular, Superintendent Byrnes is my friend, and he would see that I was avenged. You know he is a man who is utterly relentless in pursuing a case

to the end, once he has taken a fancy to do so, and I give you my word he'll know within a week just what has happened to me and the names of the men who did the deed. It'll mean the electrical chair for somebody."

"Bah! We don't scare a little bit! This gang has it in for you, an' now is deyre time to git square."

"You are trying to sic them on and escape the consequences yourself, you coward! They ought to see that. You said you would lead them. Do so, and let me have the satisfaction of tunneling your vile carcass!"

But still Bob was not anxious to stop a bullet, and he held back, speaking in a low tone to Ryswick, who was decidedly ill at ease.

The detective could see the chief schemer was beginning to grow alarmed, the effect of the liquor he had been drinking having passed from him in a measure. As his blood cooled, he was not so eager for the blood of the detective, fearing the consequences that would follow a deliberate murder.

Ryswick was not naturally a bloodthirsty man, but his association with low and vicious characters had bred in him a sort of bravado that led him to rash acts. He was more of a schemer and plotter, seeking to obtain his ends by trickery rather than by force and bloodshed. He had an intense hatred for Hawk McKnight, as the detective had baffled and troubled him not a little, but yet, in his sober moments, he realized it were better to give up the game he had planned and take to flight than to commit deliberate murder or have a hand in any act that would cause the shadow of the electrical chair to hang over his head.

But Ryswick did not have control of the mob, as Hawk could plainly see. Now that the gang knew him, they were not likely to allow him to get away unharmed if they could help it, and he felt that the clash was coming as sure as time went on. He had nerved himself for it, and he waited expectantly.

Once more the gang began to work their way toward him, slowly and surely.

"Back!" he cried, again lifting his revolver.

They paused for an instant, but did not fall back.

Once more the slow and creeping advance began.

Hawk disliked to begin the terrible battle by opening fire, but he began to think he would have to do so.

He saw them gathering for the rush.

"Now! At him!"

But, as the cry was uttered, another signal sounded through the building. It was a shrill shrieking whistle that caused every man to catch his breath.

Then a wild cry was raised below:

"The police! The police! The Ark is surrounded! We are raided!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE HEADQUARTERS RAID.

"The police!"

That cry was enough to hold Hawk's foes in check and cause their evil faces to pale.

"The Ark is surrounded! We are raided!"

That produced consternation.

"Save yourselves!"

Then the lamp in the room was suddenly extinguished, plunging the place into darkness.

Instantly Hawk changed his position, understanding it was possibly a ruse and that his life might be attempted in the darkness.

But it was no trick on the part of the Ark Gang, for the place was really surrounded by the police, who were at that moment in possession of the lower rooms.

There was a short but savage battle, during which one pistol-shot was fired; then the blue-coats were in the room where Hawk McKnight had been trapped.

Abel Keene was the first man to greet Hawk's gaze, and the police special was astounded to see his rival there.

"You?" he cried.

"Sure," laughed Hawk.

"Where's the girl?"

"What girl?"

"Miss Gregory."

"Give it up."

"She was here. I saw her taken into this house. I knew the place, and I brought the force down on it. Where is she now?"

"She was in this room when I first entered," explained Hawk, who had flung aside a portion of his disguise.

"You have been in a fight. Your clothes are torn and dirty."

"I have been in a fight, but my clothes were torn and dirty before that. It was a part of my disguise."

"And you got here ahead of me! You do beat the dickens! But the girl? You said—"

"She was here. I showed up just in time to save her from insult at the hands of Bob Darcy, who is one of the plotters working to ruin Enos Gregory."

"Where has she gone?"

"I don't know. She slipped out while I was having a little set-to with Darcy and Judah Ryswick."

"Ryswick! Man, he's dead!"

"Not a little bit."

"What do you mean? I saw his body in the Morgue!"

"You thought you did."

"It is not possible the man still lives!"

"Don't fool yourself on that point. He is very tricky, and he is as lively to-night as he ever was in all his life."

"I can't believe it!"

"You'll believe it soon, if you have arranged this raid properly, for you'll find him a prisoner in the hands of your officers."

"He cannot escape. The house was well surrounded. We shall scoop the entire gang."

They spent no more time in talk just then, but hastened together to ascertain the result of the raid.

Some of the gang had fought desperately, but the policemen asserted not a man had escaped. They were brought together in one of the large lower rooms and stood up for inspection. A sullen, vicious-looking set they were, scowling blackly at their captors. Among them were four abandoned women, who had fought against capture with all the fury of tigresses.

But, what astonished Hawk McKnight the most, was the fact that neither Bob Darcy nor Judah Ryswick were with the prisoners!

Abel Keene was also surprised, and he turned to Hawk, saying slowly:

"I don't see anything of them. Where is this Ryswick?"

"He isn't here," confessed Hawk.

"That is plain."

"He must be in hiding somewhere about the place. Order a complete and systematic search."

This Keene immediately did, and the officers set about it, leaving enough of their men to guard the prisoners.

The independent detective had also observed that there were not nearly as many prisoners as he had fancied must be taken by the police.

What had become of the rest of the Ark Gang?

Surely they must be in hiding about the place, in which case they would be found.

But they were not found, and the officers declared they had searched every corner where a rat could hide.

Keene and Hawk had taken part in the search, and the police special was on the point of openly expressing some doubts, when the private detective invited him to come with him. Taking a dark-lantern, they went to the upper room, where the conflict had taken place between Hawk and the two villains.

"I cut Bob Darcy across the hand," said the Dapper Detective, as he flashed the light of the lantern on the floor. "Look at those spots of blood."

"That does not prove Ryswick was here."

"Do you doubt my word?"

"Not at all, McKnight, but—"

"What? Say it."

"I can only think of what I saw with my own eyes in the Morgue. The clothes were Ryswick's—the body was—"

"That of some unfortunate devil used for

the purpose of deceiving the police and public."

"But the pistol-wound?"

"That was skillfully made after the man was dead."

"The stitches—"

"Were never taken by a hospital surgeon. I made that discovery on examining them. This man Ryswick took great pains to conceal the fact of his being alive and at liberty—"

"For what reason?"

"So he might not have to explain the shooting affair in Enos Gregory's office. Oh, I have made no mistake in this, Keene. Judah Ryswick, alive and well, was here in this room this very night—he was here when the alarm was given that the place was surrounded by police."

"How did he get away?"

"That is a mystery. Bob Darcy is likewise gone. Come; we'll see if we can trace them."

Then Hawk set out to track the two men by the trail the dripping blood had left. In this he was successful, tracing them step by step down a staggering flight of back stairs and into the cellar. There the trail was lost.

"There is a way of leaving this cellar," declared Hawk.

"Listen!" exclaimed Keene.

Somewhere they heard a faint sound of running water, but at first they could not tell from whence it came. Soon, however, they discovered the opening that led down into the sewer. The light of the lantern was turned upon the blackly flowing water beneath them, and then the men looked into each other's faces.

"Ebb tide," commented Hawk.

"And there is not a heavy volume of water running off by this sewer," said Keene.

"It is possible they resorted to desperate means to escape capture."

"I believe you are right. The river is only a block away. At high tide this sewer would be filled. You can even see where the water has occasionally risen into this cellar."

"Look here!"

The light of the lantern showed a splotch of blood at the edge of the break close at their feet.

"That settles it!"

"Without a doubt."

"They escaped by the sewer."

"Most certainly."

"I wonder how many of the Ark gang got away in this manner? I fancy at least a third of them escaped."

There was no time for further speculation. The question had been settled, and now the two detectives hurried back up the stairs.

"Send as many men as you can spare to the mouth of the sewer," instructed Hawk.

"It is possible some of the crooks may be caught there, even if Darcy and Ryswick get away."

Abel Keene did not hesitate about acting on this advice, and five officers hastened to the spot where the sewer emptied into the river. They were too late, however, for, although they watched there nearly an hour, not a man did they secure.

Ryswick and Darcy had escaped once more.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE DECOY'S LITTLE GAME.

WHAT had become Meda Gregory?

That was a question that troubled both the rival detectives, for they were unable to answer it.

She had disappeared completely, but Hawk was inclined to think she had not again fallen into the hands of her enemies.

"I can see but one explanation of her disappearance," he declared.

"And that?" questioned Abel Keene.

"She must have left the house before your men surrounded it."

"Is that probable?"

"I believe so. I did not see her when she fled from the room where I was battling with Darcy and Ryswick, but I know she went out some time before the raid was made. Possibly she encountered no one on the stairs, and that enabled her to flee from the house. Although I had declared myself her friend, I appeared as a

ragged and half-intoxicated old man of whom any respectable girl would naturally be terrified. Even if she understood I was a detective, she might wish to escape me as much as to avoid the scoundrels in whose power I found her, as she would know it was my object to restore her to her home. It is certain she does not mean to go back there on any pretext if she can avoid doing so."

"How did you get track of her?"

Hawk explained briefly.

"And you did not once think she had fled from New York?" questioned Keene.

"Not once."

"McKnight," said the police special, soberly, "I see I have been guilty of doing you an injustice. You are certainly one of the shrewdest men I ever met."

"Pardon my blushes. You should not try flattery on me now. I do not fancy it."

"I was never more in earnest in all my life."

"Well, I thank you. But there is work ahead of us. We must find Meda Gregory before she is driven to some mad act by her desperate situation. It is terrible to think of her being alone and adrift in this vile quarter at such an hour!"

The members of the Ark Gang who had been captured were taken away by patrol, and Abel Keene telephoned to Headquarters for permission to use six of the police squad to prosecute the search for the missing girl. His desire was granted.

But the events of the night were over. Not a trace of Meda was found, although a diligent search was made.

Hawk was forced to confess to himself that Ryswick and Darcy were the hardest rascals to corner he had ever tackled. It seemed an impossibility to get them in a trap from which they could discover no escape.

Mrs. Claxton, the beautiful adventuress, had vanished, and it might prove no easy thing to get track of her again. He was grateful to her for saving him from the wrath of Ryswick and Darcy, even though she had dealt the blow that stretched him senseless in their power. He could not believe the woman all bad, for all of her shady record.

Three hours of sleep refreshed and recuperated the Dapper Detective wonderfully, and he felt like a new man when he had eaten a hearty breakfast.

Then he examined his mail.

Among others, was a letter that immediately attracted his notice, although there did not seem to be anything about it to distinguish it from the rest, save that it was plainly from a lady.

Tearing it open with a skill that told of long experience in economizing time, he drew out the heavy sheet of scented linen paper, on which, in beautiful chirography, the following communication was written:

"LION HOTEL, No. — BOWERY.

"MR. HAWKINS MCKNIGHT,

"Private Detective:—

"DEAR SIR:—I know that you are a man of honor—a man of his word—and that is why I am willing to trust you. I have in my possession the papers that were stolen from Enos Gregory, and I will deliver them into your hands on certain conditions. I was drawn into this wretched affair by the influence of others, and now that it has become so serious, it is my desire to get out of it as quickly and easily as I possibly can. I do not pretend I am a saint, but I am not so bad as I must seem to you, and now I can see imprisonment staring me in the face, I want to do something that will let me off. That is why I appeal to you. Here is my proposal:

"If you solemnly promise to aid me in escaping from New York and the police, I will make a clean breast of everything and deliver the papers to you. I will clear up any mystery that may have perplexed you.

"I entreat you not to make the contents of this letter public, as my brother and Judah Ryswick would kill me if they dreamed I contemplated such a course. I must escape them, as well as the police.

"If you will aid me, place an advertisement in to-morrow's *Herald* 'Personal' column, saying simply, 'I agree.' I shall consider that as good as your oath. That is all.

L. B."

"Well, I wonder what this is?" muttered Hawk, scowling over the letter. "I fancy I scent a trap. I am not apt to compound a felony by giving her assistance to escape the police! It is like a woman to ask something of the kind."

He ran hastily through his other mail, and then, with a few deft touches, transformed himself into a comfortable-looking man of middle age, after which he proceeded to the Lion Hotel.

He scarcely fancied he would make any discovery there, being satisfied the name of the hotel had been used as a blind, but he was not the man to let slip anything that was in the least promising.

At the hotel he was unable to get trace of the woman who had written the letter.

Returning up-town, he proceeded directly to the Gregory mansion, where he was informed that Enos Gregory was much better, it being apparent that he would entirely recover in another day or two.

He found Keene had reported the police close upon the trail of the missing girl, assuring the family she would, without doubt, be restored to them in a short time.

Gerald Valdimer, however, did not put full trust in the pompous police special, and would have questioned Hawk had the Dapper Detective showed a willingness to answer his inquiries.

Hawk knew well enough that, like himself, Keene had lost all trace of the girl. They both knew she was somewhere in New York City, but that was all.

The independent detective believed the chances were the police would get ahead of him now they were satisfied Meda had not left New York, for they were many and he was only one. They had the advantage of him under the circumstances.

He returned to his office for a few moments, and, happening, to glance from his window, he was surprised to note a familiar figure on the street.

The strange boy, Tim Jones, was watching his office from the opposite walk, being partially hidden by a truck that had drawn up close to the curbing.

"By Jove!" muttered Hawk, drawing back so the boy could not see him. "There is a mystery about that young rascal. I would like to solve it. I believe he could tell some things that would be of great value."

At first, he thought he would go down and get hold of the lad without delay, but soon decided on another course. If he could shadow the youth, Master Tim might lead him to something interesting.

As that thought passed through his mind, he was surprised to see Tim Jones start leisurely away, evidently tired of watching the office.

"He didn't recognize me when I entered," thought Hawk. "He's going! Here's after him!"

An instant later, the door was locked and the detective was going down the stairs three at a time.

It was not a difficult thing to follow Tim Jones, and the lad was soon sauntering along Broadway, apparently on the watch for some one.

All of a sudden, the boy darted at a young man who was passing, catching hold of his sleeve and speaking a few words in a low tone.

The young man was Gerald Valdimer.

"Wonder what the kid is up to?" was the question that flashed through Hawk's mind, as he walked nearer, his ears wide open.

"I tell you I know where she is!" were the first words he heard the boy say. "I'm dead busted wide, an' I'll take you to her for fifty plunks. Not a red cent less. Is it a go, old sporty?"

"So *that's* your little game!" thought the listening detective.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HAWK SPRINTS.

THE Dapper Detective had no doubt but he knew who it was the decoy had offered to take Gerald Valdimer to; but had he felt uncertain, the following conversation would have settled the question.

Gerald caught the boy by the shoulder, hoarsely exclaiming:

"What's this you say, young fellow? You know where Meda Gregory is?"

"Bet yer life, old boy!" answered Tim, with a swagger air.

"Are you lying?"

"Now, don't make that kind of a break with me! George Washington wasn't in it with me as far as veracity goes. I'm givin' you a dead straight lay."

"But, how do *you* know Miss Gregory?" was the young man's suspicious question.

"Didn't I see her picter in the papers?"

"But you couldn't have recognized her from that."

"Think so? Well, I didn't. I know her, just the same, and if you spot down the fifty plunks, I'll take you straight to her."

"How did you know me? and what makes you think I have any interest in Miss Gregory?"

"Now, don't bother me with too many questions! I'm fly, and I know my biz, you bet! You're the girl's sweetness, and you'll come down with the scads to find her."

"Where is she?"

"Show the color of your wealth, young man!"

"You are trying a crooked game with me," came sternly from Gerald's lips, as his grasp tightened on the boy's arm. "I'll call the police and have you taken in."

Tim Jones tossed his curly head defiantly.

"Go ahead, old sport; but you won't find your best girl. I'm the only feller that can take you to her, and I'll never do it till I see the cool cash."

"If you will convince me you are telling the truth, I'll willingly pay you the money. What is she doing?"

"Hiding."

"From whom?"

"Anybody—everybody. She kinder thinks the whole world's gone back on her, I reckon. Anyhow, she acts that way. She's scared to death of everybody, and she ain't had half enough to eat since she ran away. 'Cause why? 'Cause she didn't dast to leave her room to buy feed. Last night she started out to go to a hock-shop to put up some of her sparklers, and she got into a scrape that scared her away from where she was stopping."

"What kind of a scrape?"

"Well, I wasn't sure it was her, so I just trots up and pulls off her veil. I found out I wasn't mistaken, and just then a feller that had been watching us made a run for her. He'd got her, too, but I gave him the grand flip—stood him on his face. The young lady kicked up her heels and lit out. She got away from the feller, but didn't dare come back to her room."

"Then how do you know where she is now?"

"Accident. Dead case of luck. Run onto her when I was prowling round."

"Describe her."

The boy did so, but Gerald knew he might have read the description in the newspapers. However, the young man was fairly consumed with excitement by this time, and he said:

"I'm going to take your word, boy. I'll pay you the money fast enough, and here is ten dollars to bind the bargain. You shall have the other forty when you have led me to Meda Gregory."

He thrust a ten-dollar bill into the boy's hand. For a moment, Tim Jones seemed to hesitate, and then, pocketing the money, he observed:

"I reckon you're square, old boy. I'll take your word, anyway, so come on."

Hawk had heard all this conversation, having stopped close at hand and lighted a cigar in a careless manner, his back toward the man and the boy. He was not certain whether Tim Jones was "working" Gerald Valdimer or was giving him a "square deal," but determined to follow the pair and see what the result would be.

Plainly, the lad had not been severely injured by the blow from Judah Ryswick's hard fist, for he was as saucy and pert as ever, and there was no trace of bruise or abrasion on his rather pretty face.

The detective could not think Tim was a product of the streets but wondered where the boy's home could be. There was something about the lad which seemed to indi-

cate that he was ever putting on the swagger air to deceive other people, and his assumed toughness did not sit well upon him. He had red lips and a healthy color, for all of the fact that he smoked cigarettes almost constantly, and his hands were shapely and soft, while the shoes on his feet seemed quite an amount too large for him.

There were other points about the boy that attracted the detective's notice, but he gave his attention just then to the task of following the lad and Gerald without seeming to have any object in the wide world save to get to some point already located in his mind.

A cross-town car was taken to Second avenue, and then the young man and the boy hurried down-town.

Hawk followed.

A low quarter of the city was soon reached—a quarter where thugs and toughs abounded.

As they were hurrying along, all at once, Gerald and Tim Jones came face to face with a mob of hoodlums who had been smashing the window of a Chinese laundry.

One of the toughs saw Gerald's good clothes, and set up a howl.

"Hey, chummies! Look at dis walkin' tailor shop! Git onto his style!"

"Ain't he a Jim!" yelled another.

"Oh, my! oh, my! Look at de crease in his pants!"

"And de stick he carries!"

"And de shiny shoes he wears!"

"And de board fence round his neck for a collar. Say, cul, why don't yer wear a cuff dere?"

"Spot him!"

"Biff der duffer!"

"Smooth him!"

Then the gang set on Gerald with sticks and stones and chunks of dirt.

If they expected he would take to his heels in terror, they were badly fooled.

The first piece of dirt struck squarely in the bosom of his shirt, and it aroused him to a white pitch of anger.

"You miserable loafers!" he cried, as they came at him.

And then he started in to do the whole crowd single-handed, dropping his cane and cracking two of the toughs smack in the face, knocking them over instantly.

He was an active member of the Manhattan Athletic Club, and never in his life had he been in better trim. The way he sailed into those hoodlums must have startled them not a little, and he was certainly a match for any three of them.

For all of his ability and science, Gerald would have been terribly punished but for Hawk, who came charging down on the mob like a whirlwind.

Tim Jones had taken to flight at the first appearance of danger.

Knocking half a dozen of the mob right and left, Hawk cried to Gerald:

"Now's your time to get! Don't waste any time around here! This row will call half a hundred more toughs."

Only pausing to make sure that Gerald took to his heels, Hawk darted after Tim Jones.

"I mustn't let that boy skip me again," he muttered.

When he reached the next corner, he saw Tim hurrying away as fast as his legs would carry him. The boy acted as if really frightened, strange as that appeared.

Hawk could run like a deer, and there was little chance that the lad could slip him in broad daylight.

Making a spurt, the detective was rapidly overhauling the runaway when Tim looked back and saw him. The decoy instantly made a burst of speed that was surprising, but he could not outrun Hawk.

People stared after the man and boy, but, as neither made an outcry, only a few urchins joined in the chase, and they were soon distanced.

Tim ran to Third avenue and glanced back as he turned the corner. He was astounded to find the man almost upon him, and he immediately stopped and faced about, standing sullen and defiant.

Hawk collared him.

"What's the matter with *you*?" cried the boy, both frightened and angry.

"Got you!"

"Well, what of it?"

"I want you."
 "I ain't done anything."
 "Perhaps not; but you know something."
 "Don't know a thing."
 "Then give up that X."
 "What X?"
 "The one you got from Gerald Valdimer."
 "What do you know about that?"
 "Everything. I saw it all."
 "By ginger! I'll bet I know you!"
 "Well?"
 "You're The Hawk."
 "You're right."
 Instantly a defiant look settled on the boy's face, and he shrilly cried:
 "I don't give up anything to you!"
 "Then you'll keep your agreement. Take me to Meda Gregory."
 "Didn't make any agreement with you! Won't take you anywhere."
 "Look here, boy, I'm not going to hurt you. What makes you afraid of me?"
 No reply.
 "Tell you what I'll do," said the Dapper Detective, after a slight pause. "I'll keep Valdimer's agreement."
 "How?"
 "I'll make good the fifty dollars if you'll take me to Meda."
 "It's a go!" cried Tim Jones, with satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A RAY OF LIGHT.

"I'm dead broke, and I've got to get a stake some way," explained the decoy. "If it wasn't for that, I'd never think of working this kind of a racket."
 "Was it to get money you decoyed me to Blood Alley?" sternly asked the detective.
 "Say, I *had* to do that."
 "Had to?"
 "Dead straight."
 "How did you have to?"
 "If you ask me too many questions, you musn't kick if I don't answer. But I'm giving you a square deal when I say I had to do it. I can't explain it, but it's true."
 Hawk looked at the boy searchingly, observing:
 "You're a queer kind of a chap. I don't know what to make of you."
 "Can't make anything of me, mister," was the saucy reply, with a defiant toss of the head. "I'm spoiled."
 "I believe it."
 "Is'pose you're pretty sore on me for getting you into that scrape in Blood Alley?"
 "Well, it looked as if you were trying to aid my enemies to kill me, for I have foes who would be glad to put me out of the way."
 "They said they only wanted to catch you and shut you up somewhere till they had worked some kind of a game. I kinder wanted you out of the way, too, 'cause—" The boy stopped confused.
 "Because what?"
 Tim shook his head.
 "I've been talking too much. I'm a clam. This way, if you want to find the girl."
 Hawk allowed the strange lad to conduct him, taking care Tim did not make any attempt to break and run.
 "Look here," said the Dapper Detective, "you don't want to try any crookedness on me to-day."
 "Don't worry."
 "It won't pay."
 "I guess that's right. You're bound to come out best in the end, and I ain't trying to fool you any more. I've taken your word and given you mine. I'll stick to my agreement, if you do to yours."
 They proceeded down Third avenue a distance and then turned back to Second avenue again.
 At length, Tim halted, saying gravely:
 "The girl is right over there, one flight up, small room back. I've got her located fine, but I'll bet she'll jump out of the window before she lets us in. She's scared to death, and the chances are she'd commit suicide within two days if not taken home."
 "Who has charge of this house?" asked Hawk.
 "An old Irish woman named Mother Mohan."
 "Well, Mother Mohan is the person we want to see first. Can we find her there?"
 "I reckon we'll find her hitting a can of beer in the back kitchen."

"Take me to her."
 They had very little trouble in finding Mother Mohan, and, after tickling the old lady's palm with a bright silver dollar, Hawk easily induced her to assist him, first assuring her the young lady had done nothing for which she was to be arrested. All Hawk desired was that the woman should induce the girl to open the door without letting her know any one besides herself desired admission.
 Mother Mohan proceeded to the little back room, followed by Hawk and Tim Jones. The Irish woman stepped so heavily the others easily disguised their footsteps by timing them with hers. Plunk, plunk plunk she walked over the bare floor, and then she rapped lightly on the tightly closed door, beyond which Meda Gregory was supposed to be.
 The first knock elicited no response, but when it was repeated a little more loudly, a faint voice called:
 "Who's there?"
 "It's me, dear," answered the woman, in a beery voice.
 "After a brief silence came the faltering question:
 "Who is 'me'?"
 "Jist Mrs. Mohan, dear."
 "What do you want?"
 "Oi warnt to come in fer a bit, darlint," thickly purred the old woman.
 "Go away!"
 "Now, don't be afther drivin' me away whin Oi came to bring yez something, alana!"
 "I don't want anything—only to be let alone."
 "An' ye niver 'attn' a boight this whole blissid marnin'! It's shtarvin' yersilf ye are!"
 "I'm not hungry."
 "Sure ye are, choild! It's a bit av broth Oi've brought yez. Open th' door jist woide enough so Oi kin pass it in."
 There was another silence, and then a faint stir near the door.
 Hawk prepared to enter the moment the key turned in the lock.
 "You're very kind," said the same faltering voice; "but I really don't care for anything to eat."
 "Oi'll niver hiv any wan shtarve in me house av hoonger," stoutly averred Mrs. Mohan. "It's niver a shtep will Oi go away fram this dure until ye take this bit av broth Oi've brought yez. Now, do be sinsible, dear! It's a respectable house Oi kape, an' Oi won't hiv anybody dyin' on me hands. Jist open the dure a bit an' take this bowl av broth, darlint."
 Although the old woman's voice was husky, she succeeded in making it very coaxing and effective.
 "Is there anybody with you?"
 "Niver a saoul," promptly lied Mother Mohan, adding under her breath: "Th' Saints forgive me!"
 "You are sure?"
 "Yis, dear."
 Then the key was turned in the lock and the door cautiously opened a bit.
 Without the least hesitation, Hawk forced it wide and stepped into the room, followed by Tim Jones and Mother Mohan.
 Meda Gregory was indeed there, and, terrified beyond measure, she retreated, uttering a gasping cry.
 "Here be some fri'nds Oi've brought ye, darling," purred Mrs. Mohan, placidly. "Anyhow, they do be afther sayin' they're fri'nds."
 "I have no friends!" cried Meda, in distress, her face pallid. "Oh, why did you tell me a falsehood, Mrs. Mohan? Take them away! I have no friends!"
 "You are wrong," quietly said the detective, attempting to speak in a manner that would reassure her. "I am certainly your friend, Miss Gregory."
 Another cry came from the girl, and she covered her face with her hands.
 "I'm not Miss Gregory," she pantingly declared. "I am Ada Maples! You have made a mistake, sir!"
 Having her photograph in his pocket, Hawk had recognized her as the missing Meda the moment he set eyes on her.
 "It is useless to deny your identity, Miss Gregory," said he, quietly. "You have fled from your home for no reasonable cause—"

"Oh, you do not know—you cannot know!" cried the trembling girl, wringing her hands.
 "I *do* know."
 "You have come here to take me back! I will not go! I can't go there!"
 "You shall not go until you are perfectly willing to do so," assured Hawk, confident he could soon secure her assent. "Do not be afraid of me, Miss Gregory. I give you my word of honor you shall not be harmed. Sit down. You are quite unnerved."
 He placed the one wretched chair for her, and she sunk upon it, bursting into tears.
 "Oh, the disgrace!" she sobbed. "Why was I evea born? I would I were dead!"
 Mrs. Mohan lifted a corner of her dirty apron to her eyes and began to blubber, the beer she had swallowed having placed her in a very sympathetic condition.
 "Ochone!" she wailed, huskily. "Av ye take on loike thot it'll break me heart intoirly, darlint!"
 Hawk quickly approached the woman and quietly urged her out of the room, slipping another half-dollar into her fingers and asking her to keep away unless called for.
 Tim Jones actually looked distressed, but he was waiting quietly and expectantly.
 The detective went back to Meda, trying to quiet her. The girl had wept so much that she was already exhausted, and he could see she sadly needed sleep and nourishment.
 "There is to be no disgrace, Miss Gregory," said Hawk, soothingly. "Your head is full of false notions put there by the lying words of a woman who is nothing but an adventuress."
 "But she had the papers—the proof!"
 Hawk did not show any surprise or eagerness, although he fancied he stood on the threshold of discovery. In another moment the girl might reveal the nature of those mysterious papers.
 "What if those papers were forged?" he said.
 "They were not!" was the reply. "She told me how they were stolen from father's pocket, and how a man was shot in father's office, where a battle was taking place over those same papers. She had tried to get them, but failed. She called in this man to assist her, knowing the papers were in father's safe. The man was an expert at opening safes, and, when father was not in the office, he set about the work of securing the papers. He had succeeded in opening the safe when father returned and discovered him. Then a terrible fight ensued, and—and—the man was shot."
 At last the Dapper Detective knew just how the tragedy had come about in Enos Gregory's office! But, it was still a mystery who had shot Judah Ryswick. He remembered the first thing he had noted on entering the office was that a large safe was standing open and the wounded man was stretched unconscious on the floor before it. Abel Keene's theory that the broker had been involved with his pretty type-writer and that Ryswick had demanded hush-money was utterly exploded.
 Hawk was about to question the girl when a sharp step sounded at the door, and Mother Mohan's voice was heard saying:
 "Roight in that way, sur; you'll foind thim all there. Stip roight in."
 Then Gerald Valdimer entered.
 "Meda!" he cried, in a thrilling voice, bounding forward to catch the fainting form of his sweetheart in his strong arms.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE CONFESSION OF THE DEAD.

GERALD, believing he had been tricked by Tim Jones, and thinking the man who had aided him in his battle with the hoodlums might possibly be in the plot, had followed Hawk at a distance. When he saw the man and the boy talking together he was more than ever convinced he was the victim of a "job," and he took pains not to let them escape him. Thus he found his way to Mother Mohan's on Second avenue.
 A bit of "palm oil" had persuaded the greedy old woman to tell him just how matters stood, and then she showed him to the little back room.
 With Meda's fainting form on his arm, he turned fiercely on the detective, crying:

"I call the trick! Your crooked game doesn't go! Keep off!"

Hawk was astonished, but he instantly comprehended that Gerald thought him an enemy.

"It's a square deal, young man," he assured, quietly.

But, the triumphant lover took no stock in the statement, as his flashing eyes plainly indicated.

"You can't fool me!" he asserted.

"I have no desire to fool you, Valdimer. I heard your bargain with this boy, and I was shadowing you when you ran into those young ruffians. But for me you would have been badly punished."

Gerald recognized the truth of this statement, and was silenced for the moment.

"I overtook the boy and made an agreement to stand by your bargain. I owe him forty dollars for bringing me here."

"But—but why should you blow your money for such a thing?"

"I am Hawkins McKnight!"

Up to that moment Gerald had not recognized the respectable middle-aged gentleman, but now he realized that the detective spoke the truth.

"I beg a thousand pardons!" he cried, in consternation and confusion. "Your disguise deceived me! But Miss Gregory—she has fainted! Something must be done."

"Put her down on the bed there," advised Hawk. "Get her head lower than her feet, so the blood will begin to do its work properly once more. She'll come around in a few moments."

He assisted Gerald, and barely had they placed the unconscious girl on the bed before her eyelids fluttered and a low moan came from her lips.

Knowing what must follow her return to consciousness, Hawk hustled Mrs. Mohan and Tim Jones out of the room, following them and closing the door.

"We'll leave them alone for a while," he said.

"Th' dear swate young craycher and the lovely illegant young mon!" slobbered Mother Mohan. "It's married they'll be some day."

Tim Jones demanded his money, but Hawk induced him to wait a short time.

After ten or fifteen minutes, the detective, accompanied by the boy, on whom he quietly kept a close watch, rapped at the door of the little back room.

"Come in," called Gerald's voice.

They entered.

Meda was sitting on a chair, having quite recovered, although she was still pallid. There was a look of resignation and happiness on her pretty face.

"It's all right," declared Gerald. "I have induced her to go home with me. But I should have never found her if it had not been for you, Mr. McKnight. I'll not forget it! You saved me from a terrible beating at the hands of those street ruffians, and then you overtook the boy."

"Where is that boy. Oh, there he is! I'm ready to make good the fifty dollars on the spot."

A moment later two twenty dollar bills were placed in Tim Jones's grasp.

"Thank you, mister," said the lad, hat in hand. "You're a brick!"

Tim would have departed then, but the detective detained him.

"Hold on, my lad," said Hawk, grasping his arm. "I want to have a little talk with you."

"What for?" asked Tim, not a little alarmed.

"I have a few questions to ask you," replied the detective. "I want you to come up to my office."

"You're not going to arrest me?"

"Arrest you? What for?"

"I don't know."

"For leading me into Blood Alley? No, Tim; I hold no grudge for that. I simply want to question you."

"You won't get any satisfaction out of me," was the defiant declaration. "I don't know anything."

"Well, I'll just see how much you do know."

So, leaving Gerald to take Meda home in a cab, Hawk escorted Tim to a Third avenue car, and they started up-town, for all of the boy's objections.

The Dapper Detective was satisfied the lad could tell a great deal, providing he could be induced to speak out.

For all of the fact that a portion of the mystery about the tragedy in Enos Gregory's office had been cleared up, there were still many points that needed investigation.

Why had the broker lied about the affair?

Why had he declared Judah Ryswick shot himself?

Why had he sought to shield his typewriter in any way?

The secret of the stolen papers was a secret still, and they were yet in the possession of Enos Gregory's enemies.

That blackmail was the motive which led the villains to enter such a desperate game there could be no doubt.

That the contents of the papers concerned the broker's daughter in some way was equally certain.

Perhaps, when she had rested and was herself once more, the girl would reveal what had led her to so rashly flee from her home and seek to hide herself amid the slums.

In the mean time, what had become of Ryswick and his accomplices?

Reaching Twenty-third street, Hawk and the boy left the car. Tim Jones made no attempt to break from the detective and run, although he went along sullenly.

Straight to his office the detective proceeded, and there he found a message awaiting him.

It was as follows:

"HAWK MCKNIGHT:—I have changed my mind and shall make no attempt to escape from the city. I am sick of the game and sick of this wretched life! If you will come to B—Hotel, Bowery, and call at Room 13, you will find me awaiting you. I have the stolen papers. Come direct to the room, without making any inquiries. This is straight.

LEONA BEAUMONT."

"Leona Beaumont," muttered the detective, aloud.

"What's that?" cried Tim Jones, excitedly. "That writing—I know it! It is Leo's!"

"And who is Leo?"

"A friend," was the evasive reply.

Hawk pushed the message across the table, so the boy could read it.

When Tim had finished the last word, he cried, excitedly:

"It is from her! And she means to do something desperate! Look what she says: 'I am sick of the game and sick of this wretched life!' Oh, curse Judah Ryswick for the black-hearted villain he is!"

"Come!" he added, wildly; "you must answer this—you must go to her! I am going! Don't try to stop me! I tell you she is desperate! Will you come, Mister Hawk?"

Hawk immediately decided to answer the message. He knew it might be a trap, but, making sure his weapons were ready for use, he resolved to take the chances.

The boy, burning with eagerness, urged the detective forward. They took a car to Third avenue, and there they mounted the stairs and boarded an L train.

In a short time, they reached the Bowery and found the B—Hotel.

Following the directions of the message, they mounted the stairs to Room 13. A knock on the door brought no response, and it was repeated still more loudly, but with the same result.

Then Tim Jones eagerly turned the knob, and the door opened before his hand. He entered the room, and Hawk followed.

There was but a single occupant in the wretched room—a woman, who was seated in a poor arm-chair before a small table on which were writing materials. The woman's head was leaning back against the chair and she was staring straight at them.

She did not make a move or utter a sound as they entered!

Hawk recognized her as the mysterious Mrs. Claxton!

"Leo—sister!" cried the boy, in thrilling tones, as he sprung forward and caught at a hand which lay on the table.

He dropped the hand as quickly as he had picked it up, staggering backward and literally shrieking:

"My God! She is dead!"

The detective caught the falling body of the boy in his arms, lowering it to the floor, for the lad had fainted.

Then he sprung forward and shook the woman in the chair. Her head fell to one side, and he saw the glaze of death was on her eyes. He felt for the pulse, but could discover not a flutter of life. Then he listened for the beating of the heart, but the heart of the beautiful adventuress was silenced forever.

On the table sat an empty glass that had once contained liquor. In the bottom of the glass were a few white grains that had settled there.

"It's suicide!" muttered Hawk. "The woman poisoned herself without a doubt!"

A pen dipped in ink, with the penstock standing straight from the nozzle of the bottle, together with ink-stains on the fingers of her right hand, proved that the woman had been writing just before she died.

Two sheets of paper lay on the table, and on them there was written:

"Here, Hawk McKnight, are the papers you seek. I have kept them since they came into my possession. As you will see, they prove nothing save that Meda Gregory is an adopted child, not the daughter of Enos Gregory. This fact is not even known to Mrs. Gregory, whose child died a few hours after its birth. Meda, through an arrangement of Gregory's and the craft of the nurse, was installed in the dead infant's place, while the corpse of the little one was spirited away and secretly buried. To this day, Mrs. Gregory believes Meda to be her own child.

"Meda is the daughter of Enos Gregory's sister, who married a man that misappropriated certain funds intrusted in his care and was forced to flee the country. After the girl was born, her mother placed her in Gregory's care, requesting him to never let the child know who its parents were. Then she followed her husband to Australia, where both died of contagious disease.

"Gregory's sister was wealthy, and she left a great fortune in collaterals, bonds and real estate to be bestowed on her child, trusting everything to Gregory's care, as these stolen papers will show. She had succeeded in keeping this property beyond the grasp of the law and those who sought retaliation on her defaulting husband.

"Enos Gregory was false to his trust, for, having speculated unwisely and lost his own fortune, he has sunk more than half of Meda's. Some way Judah Ryswick came to suspect the truth, and he plotted to get possession of the proof, so he could wring Gregory dry by demanding hush-money. I am too tired to unfold the whole plot, but it was on the point of succeeding when Gregory found Ryswick kneeling before his opened safe. Then came the fight and the shooting of Ryswick. Who shot him I do not know; he does not know himself. It was not Enos Gregory!

"We obtained the papers by accident, but Gregory had been injured, and he could not be reached. Then he sought to wring hush-money from Meda. We did not know her, or we would not have tried. I went to the house and saw her. There I sought to convince her that she was not the daughter of Mrs. Gregory, but was Enos Gregory's child by another mother. I told her the secret would be kept if she would pay a certain sum of money. She made an appointment to see me the next day, and then she ran away. I fear she will kill herself if she is not soon found and restored to her home.

"That is all. I feel sure the game will be balked in the end, and I see a prison before me. I will never go there! I am not so bad as I must seem, for I have a conscience, and that conscience has made me wretched during the last few days. Judah Ryswick worked my downfall, and I hope he will be punished, as he richly deserves to be. As for myself, when you read this I shall be beyond the reach of earthly punishment.

LEONA BEAUMONT."

On another sheet of paper she had written:

"The coroner need not trouble to investigate the cause of my death. I am sick of life, and have swallowed poison. That is all.

LEONA BEAUMONT."

Hawk picked up the full confession, and carefully folding it, he thrust it into his pocket, saying:

"This must not become public property. I will try to shield Gregory and spare Meda." Then he secured the papers that had been stolen from the senseless broker's pocket.

A great many mysterious things were now very plain to him. He could understand, in a measure, Gregory's singular actions and words, for the man had been harassed by the fear that the whole unpleasant truth would come out.

He could also now clearly understand Meda's remarkable actions and words and the cause of her mysterious flight from home. She had sought to shield her father, even though her method had not been a very good one. She believed she was living beneath a roof where she had no right to remain, and so she had run away! Her horror and fear lest the truth should come out, and her lover despise her, were certainly natural.

But one mystery still remained unsolved: Who shot Judah Ryswick?

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FURTHER REVELATIONS.

FOR the moment, Hawk had forgotten Tim Jones, who lay on the floor; but now a faint sigh came from the boy's lips, and the detective was immediately bending over him.

"Poor little fellow!" muttered Hawk. "He called her *sister*! I begin to understand how he is involved in this affair."

The boy's teeth were set and he apparently was breathing with difficulty. Hawk, proceeding to loosen his clothes about his throat, all at once fell back, uttering an exclamation of profound astonishment:

"Well, hang me! Who would have thought it?"

He had made a most astounding discovery.

Tim Jones was a girl!

Pausing a moment to recover from his amazement, the detective muttered:

"Well, she made a gallus kid! She was a first class boy in appearance, and I think she would have fooled any one."

He chafed her hands for some moments, and she finally opened her eyes. Now that he knew she was a girl, she seemed strangely pretty and charming.

For a moment she looked at him in wonder, appearing to have forgotten everything; then she sat up, crying:

"Tell me—was it true? My sister—dead! No, no! it can't be!"

"Steady, my girl!" said the detective, calmly, as he placed his body before her, so she could not see the dead girl in the chair.

"Tim" started back.

"You—you know!" she faltered, afrighted.

"That you are not a boy—yes."

"Well, it makes no difference; I do not care. I have kept the secret longer than I thought I could at first."

"You made an excellent boy."

"But my sister! What has happened? Is it all a dream? I thought—"

Then, over Hawk's shoulder, she saw the dead girl sitting at the table. She stared like one turned to stone, not uttering any cry or making a move for some seconds.

Hawk helped her as he arose to her feet. She slowly stepped to the table and looked into the face of the dead one, and then, all at once, frantically caught the detective by the wrist.

"Send for a doctor—send for a doctor!" she gasped. "Don't lose a moment! Quick!"

"Too late," was his grave reply. "Your sister has been dead for more than an hour."

She fell limply against him, and he put his arm about her, thus supporting her. His heart was full of compassion for her, as he felt her trembling violently in his arms.

"Dead!" came hollowing from her white lips. "How did she die?"

"She committed suicide. See, here is what she has written to the coroner."

All at once the girl in boy's clothes straightened up, her hands clinched and her eyes blazing.

"She did *not* commit suicide!" was her cry.

"But here is the statement in her own handwriting."

"That may be, but it was not suicide! She may have prepared the poison with her own hand and swallowed it here alone, but it was *not* suicide! She was *murdered*!"

"Murdered?"

"As sure as there is a heaven!"

"By whom?"

"Judah Ryswick, as he is known to-day!—Fred Wayne, as he was once called!"

"It is not possible!"

"It *is* possible! I do not mean that the wretch stood over her and compelled her to drink the poison."

"Then what do you mean?" questioned Hawk, puzzled by the girl's wild words and manner.

"I mean that he ruined her life—made her what she is—led her to fleece other men that he might live in luxury! I mean that he forced her into this Gregory affair, and now, in a fit of remorse, she has killed herself. Although his hand did not hold the poison to her lips, he is as much her murderer as if it had!"

"I see," nodded the detective. "I understand you now." Then, looking at the beautiful face of the dead, he added: "I believe you are right!"

"I know I am right! And, true as there is a Heavenly Father, he shall be punished! I swear it! *I swear it!*"

The scene was dramatic and impressive, for the girl caught up the hand of her dead sister as she uttered the words, pressing the cold fingers to her lips. She did not weep or break down, although it was plain a perfect tempest of grief and fury was tearing at her heart.

"He is a double villain!" she madly continued, once more facing the awed detective. "He took *me* from my home and made me what I am! He solemnly promised to marry me, but there is no wedding-ring on my finger! He had never seen Leona then, but chance—bitter fate—brought them together! I did not know he had met her—he kept it a secret from me. Leona did not know Judah Ryswick was the Fred Wayne with whom I had run away from home. She thought him an honorable gentleman. He promised to marry her, and I believe there was a ceremony, but it was all a mockery. He was too shrewd—too vile—to tie himself to any woman! He took her away with him, deserting me, and for months I have been tracking them. I found them here in New York at last."

The girl was now wildly walking up and down the room, wringing her hands, but with her eyes still tearless. The words poured in a perfect torrent from her lips, and the detective listened spellbound.

"I went to my sister," continued the girl—"I told her the truth. Ah! but she could not leave him then! He had her fast in his cruel grasp—she was his slave—his abject slave! He had forced her to the last depth of degradation that money might be made for him to spend on horses, fine clothes and high living. She told me she was past redemption—she begged me to leave her to her unhappy fate. Poor sister Leo!"

For a moment the girl's lips quivered and it seemed that she might break down. But she did not. She went on, as before:

"I did not give up hope of saving my sister. I thought to get her from his clutch in some way. But he found I was in New York, and, one day, we came face to face. I had been afraid of him, but I was not afraid when I stood facing him. I denounced him—I told him what he was! He laughed at me! Then I begged him to go away and leave my sister. He told me he was not fool enough to desert the goose that laid the golden egg. That was the last straw. If I had held a weapon then, I would have killed him on the spot! As it was, I flew at his throat, and he struck me in the face with his clinched fist, knocking me senseless. When I recovered he was gone."

The thought of the villain's brutal act caused her to grind her white teeth, while her hands were clinched fiercely.

Hawk held his breath, convinced that another revelation was coming. He really anticipated what would follow, but he listened eagerly.

"Then I purchased a revolver," cried the girl. "I was ready for him! I said I would kill him! I carried it with me for some time, but he always avoided me. I could not find him in places where a girl might go, and so, after I had carried the revolver for a week, I had my hair cut and

donned boy's clothing. I made a good boy, proof of which is that I deceived you."

"About that time, I found my sister was working as type-writer in the office of a Wall street broker. I discovered the man's name, and I used to haunt the vicinity of the office. I discovered Fred Wayne went to see the broker or Leo every morning. I had thought of shooting him on the open street, but I knew I would be arrested, and punished if I did. I wanted to kill and escape, so I planned to do the job in such a way that no one would know how it happened. I skulked about the buildings until I located the back windows of Gregory's office, and, one morning, I discovered a ladder that enabled me to climb to the fire-escape. I looked through the window, which was down a short distance from the top, and saw two men fighting like tigers. One was Mr. Gregory; the other was Fred Wayne. Something told me my time had come."

It was with difficulty Hawk McKnight repressed an exclamation of satisfaction. All his theories had proved correct!

Ryswick was shot from the fire-escape and through the open window.

He was shot by a woman, as the hair coiled about the trigger of the weapon had indicated. The tracks made beneath the window were such as would have been made by a boy. The disguised girl wore a boy's shoes.

Once more he listened.

"Wayne had a revolver, but Gregory wrested it from him. Then the broker seemed on the point of using it. I heard Wayne say something about knowing the secret of the papers, even though he had failed to get possession of them. Then Gregory swore he should die. He lifted the revolver, and, seeing my opportunity, I fired through the opening of the window. My bullet did not miss, and, as Wayne fell, I heard Gregory cry: 'My God! Did I shoot!' Then I scrambled down the fire-escape and the ladder, dropping the revolver in my hurry. When I reached the ground I could not find it, and I did not spend much time in searching. I ran away, triumph in my heart, for I thought I had killed Fred Wayne. But I failed, and now my poor sister—my dear sweet Leo—is dead, murdered by that man!"

The mystery of the shooting was solved at last!

CHAPTER XL.

THE LAST STRUGGLE.

Now that it was all told, the girl would have broken down, but the detective had one question to ask:

"Your brother—why didn't *he* avenge your sister's wrongs?"

She made a gesture of despair.

"He is only our half-brother, and he is even worse than Fred Wayne! He did not care how low we sunk! He and Wayne are now hand-and-glove."

"Wayne, or Ryswick, is wanted. Can't you assist me in finding him?"

"I can—I will! I know all his haunts. He has been driven from one to another by the police, but I think I can take you to him. Come!"

Hawk was only too ready to go, but he told her he must first see that a coroner was notified of her sister's death. In her excitement, she had quite forgotten about anything of the kind.

Hawk went below and made inquiries about the woman who had taken Room 13, soon learning she had come there alone the previous day, and, to the knowledge of the clerk and proprietor, had received no visitors. They were astounded to learn that she had committed suicide.

Having seen everything properly attended to, the detective returned for the vengeful sister of the dead. She was waiting, and they started out together to look for Judah Ryswick.

In a squalid, wretched room two men sat glowering at each other across a table, on which was a whisky-bottle and empty glasses. They had been drinking heavily, and now they were quarreling.

"I tell you we had better throw up the sponge and get out of this city lively," declared Judah Ryswick. "The game is lost."

and we'll be in the jug within three days if we sit here!"

"You can sneak if yer want to," sneered Bob Darcy, whose right hand was concealed by a bloody bandage. "But I did think you had blood in yer body. I see it's water!"

"What's that? Have a care, you dog!"

"An' yer don't want to call me a dog! See! I'm dead game, an' here I stay!"

"What's the use. Leona has the papers, and she has given us the slip."

"She'll show up. Me sister ain't no flunk! Yer don't want to cast any insinuations at her, Mr. Wayne."

"Oh, hang your sister—and you too! You're both fools, and I—"

Bob Darcy flung himself across the table, clutching at the speaker's throat and uttering a snarl.

"Take it back! I'll—"

Ryswick flung him off and scrambled rather clumsily to his feet, the liquor having gotten into his legs, as well as his head. His eyes gleamed redly, and his lips curled back, showing the devil in his nature.

"You won't do anything, Darcy," he snarled. "You can't fool with me! I'm not a pig-head, and I know when to run, if you don't. We came near being pinched last night, only escaping by the skin of our teeth, and I'm going to skip. You can stay and go up the river."

"You don't flunk and leave me and Leo in the soup—not much! I'll choke ye till you agree to stay with us, sink or swim! I can lick yer anyway, and it'll do me a heap of good!"

"Keep off!"

"Oh, I'm goin' to choke yer!"

"Keep off, I say!"

"Now, ye'r 'scared!"

"You lie!"

With a snarl, Bob Darcy made a lunge at Ryswick, and the two men grabbled like fighting dogs. There was a savage tussle, and then Ryswick drew a knife, just as Bob broke away and leaped back.

"Well, you would have it," grated the chief rascal, as he advanced on Bob. "Have it you shall! This is your own knife, that I sneaked yesterday, and I'll see how sharp it is!"

The struggle and the choking he had received had aroused him to the last pitch. He would hesitate at nothing now, and Bob Darcy suddenly realized that his companion in crookedness meant murder.

Darcy was an arrant coward at heart, and instantly turned to get out of the way, screaming for help. He ran around the table, Ryswick pursuing.

There came a sudden pounding at the door, and a commanding voice cried:

"Open in the name of the law!"

"Help! help!" screamed the frightened thug. "Break down the door!"

"I'll do you first!" came from Ryswick's foaming lips, as he vaulted over the table.

He struck the floor, slipped, fell on his face and uttered a groan, making no move to rise. Bob Darcy cowered back in a corner, shaking like an aspen and scarcely able to stand, as the door fell with a crash, to admit Abel Keene and two policemen.

Keene promptly collared the thug, while one of the officers turned Ryswick on his back, discovering the knife in his breast.

He had fallen squarely on the point, but what seemed an accident was surely the work of retributive justice!

As they turned him over, he gasped faintly, and said:

"I didn't get him! Fell on—the knife! Meant to—cut—him with—his own sticker! I'm—done—"

Yes, he was *done*, for with that word he drew his last breath!

"Well," observed one of the policemen, looking at Bob Darcy. "It's a mighty good thing for you, young feller, that he had wind enough to say that much! If he hadn't, you'd been in it—*bad!*"

At this instant, Hawk McKnight and his girl companion appeared.

"Hello, McKnight," saluted Keene. "You're a bit late. I've got one, and the other is—"

"Where?" cried the girl.

"There!" The police special pointed down at the floor.

The independent detective's companion leaped forward and bent over the dead man.

"Too late!" she muttered, regretfully. "He's dead! He'll ruin no more lives!"

It all ended very satisfactorily, for Meda was convinced she had been deceived by Leona Beaumont, and she was happy once more in her own home when her father was restored to his usual health.

The only persons besides Hawk McKnight who became aware of the full facts of the case were Enos Gregory and Abel Keene. Keene was present when Hawk, after the broker had quite recovered, restored the papers to their proper owner and revealed what he had discovered. The police special fairly gasped with amazement as the facts came out.

As for Enos Gregory, he heard everything as calmly as he could, confessing that the plotters had discovered the truth concerning his relation to Meda. When Hawk restored the stolen papers, the broker's satisfaction was without limit.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, in a business way, "How much will it cost to keep you silent on this matter? Understand, I do not wish my wife or Meda to know the truth, as it is better Mrs. Gregory should not become aware I have deceived her, and it is much more satisfactory for Meda to still think she is my child. Not one cent of her property shall be lost to her, for, in time, I can raise enough on my own possessions to make full restoration."

"How much will keep you silent, gentlemen?"

"Not a cent for me!" declared Abel Keene, with a gurgle in his fat throat. "It is none of my concern, and I know my business to a T. I didn't discover the secret, and, now I know it, oxen couldn't draw it out of me! As for taking money beyond my regular pay, that would be robbery!"

The broker turned to Hawk, but the independent detective simply laughed.

"I entered this affair for glory," he said. "I started out to get ahead of Abel Keene—"

"And did so, by thunder!" puffed the police special.

"I shall not get a great deal of glory," Hawk went on, "for the facts must not come out beyond a certain point. But, as for taking money, such a thing is quite out of the question. That settles it!"

But it did *not* settle it, for Enos Gregory drew a check for a handsome sum in the Dapper Detective's favor and forced it on Hawk. It was really but a just reward for the service rendered.

Bob Darcy received a short sentence, and when he was free once more he promptly sailed for Australia, having learned it was the only way to escape going back to prison on other charges.

After her unfortunate sister's burial, Amy Darcy, who had played the part of "Tim Jones," disappeared completely, and it is not known whither she went. It is to be hoped she is living somewhere an honest and upright life, respected by those who know her.

Enos Gregory abandoned stocks for the safer ventures in real estate, and, in less than a year, he had won back all he had lost on the street. He kept his word in making good every dollar of Meda's fortune, but when it was bestowed upon her at her marriage with Gerald Valdimer, the girl only understood it as a magnificent and generous gift from her "dear father."

Mrs. Gregory lives on as usual, absorbed in fashionable society and filled with limitless pride over the magnificent match her "daughter" has made. In her case "ignorance is bliss," and it would certainly be cruel to undeceive her.

Hawkins McKnight is doing business at the old stand, but he now has a partner. And who do you suppose it is?

Abel Keene!

Filled with admiration for the young man who had beaten him on the Gregory case, Keene proposed to go into company with Hawk, and the proposition was accepted. He promptly resigned his position on the regular detective force, and now this sign adorns a certain doorway on upper Broadway—

"HAWK & KEENE,

"Independent Detectives."

THE END.

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